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Alf Siewers

*Bucknell University*, [asiewers@bucknell.edu](mailto:asiewers@bucknell.edu)

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# LANDSCAPES OF CONVERSION: GUTHLAC'S MOUND AND GREDEL'S MERE AS EXPRESSIONS OF ANGLO-SAXON NATION BUILDING

ALFRED K. SIEWERS

**M**odern scholarship long believed that descriptions of nature in Anglo-Saxon literature tended to be more alienated and distanced in tone and theme than those in neighboring contemporary Insular literary cultures. This judgment was often extended to include differences in their treatment of pre-Christian ancestral traditions associated with natural landscapes. J. R. R. Tolkien in his foundational study of *Beowulf* defined this view most famously when he contrasted Anglo-Saxon lore with "less severe Celtic learning."<sup>1</sup> In a recent examination of the construction of nature in Old English poetry, Jennifer Neville notes more precisely:

For the Old English poet, the representation of the natural world helps to create the context of helplessness and alienation that motivates the seeking of God. For the Irish poet, the representation of the natural world creates the context of wonder and joy that surrounds the seeking of God.<sup>2</sup>

In this she echoes Margaret Goldsmith's comparison a generation earlier of "creation songs" in early Irish and Old English verse:

... the Irishman shows a typical interest in the small creatures, the birds and the fish, and the domestic creatures, fire and cattle, whereas the English poet sweeps his gaze across the whole earth and the firmament.<sup>3</sup>

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Despite such explication, the underlying consensus has gone relatively unexamined and unexplained since Tolkien's time. Suspensions about romanticized notions of ethnic temperament, doubts about the validity of definitive historical labeling of ethnic identity in Britain,<sup>4</sup> and greater awareness of the heterogeneity of early medieval Insular texts all have tended to shift the focus of discussion away from such issues of alleged cultural difference. At the same time, however, newer ecocritical approaches to texts, foregrounding the background of narrative while contextualizing its expression of cultural attitudes toward nature, now make it possible to acknowledge (and explain) in qualified terms this long-observed difference in emphasis.<sup>5</sup>

In applying ecocritical approaches to early Insular narratives, we can see a distinct (though far from monolithic) emphasis in Anglo-Saxon construction of literary landscape, one supporting the appropriation of nature for nation-building, which is based in the emerging Augustinian theology of western Europe. This ideological project involved a significantly different orientation toward natural landscape overall than was found in the neighboring early literatures of Wales and Ireland, where regional cultures were positioning themselves as native by constructing a more positive engagement with pre-Christian ancestral tradition and nature, amid a different ecclesiastical context.<sup>6</sup>

This study examines the most extensive extant Anglo-Saxon landscape narratives, the Old English poem *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Latin and Old English prose and poetic versions of the *Life* of St. Guthlac, from an ecocritical perspective. In these texts, the mere and monsters in *Beowulf*, and the fens and demons in the Guthlac tales can be seen as landscape narratives both of conquest and possession, and of the formation of cultural identity. They are contemporary literary equivalents of the construction of Offa's Dyke, defining a new cultural pattern of landscape on the island of Britain.<sup>7</sup> They also thus reflect the political and cultural situation of eighth-century Mercia, which as the dominant Anglo-Saxon kingdom was in desperate need of an ethnic identity, given the somewhat shadowy nature of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity in its domain. These landscapes of control also necessarily reflect the theological authority of the Augustinian outlook on nature that was especially pronounced for historical reasons in the Anglo-Saxon church.<sup>8</sup> Augustinian sign theory and views on theophany (related as they were to an emphasis on the fallen nature of the world and the centrality of grace) made it natural to see landscape in what was both a more objectified and allegorical way than was the case with neighboring literatures in Ireland

and Wales. Examination here of two landscape-related motifs in the Anglo-Saxon narratives, that of the battle for the haunted barrow and that of the heroic venture into otherworldly waters, will illustrate how the creative tension between Augustinian otherworldliness and secular nation-building produced a new cultural landscape in both polity and literature for emerging Anglo-Saxon elites. In addition, psychoanalytic critic Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, as she relates it to medieval Western theology, will be used to help understand this process of cultural differentiation in terms of how constructions of nature relate to development of a new kind of performative subjectivity for cultures and people in the early medieval West.

Somewhat paradoxically, Augustinian theological emphases on the corruption of nature, extended to natural landscape and its ancestral associations with indigenous culture, empowered the Anglo-Saxon ideological project of superimposing a new cultural landscape on Britain's most fertile land areas, in narrative landscapes based on a sense of Anglo-Saxon culture as God-chosen and hegemonic that erased textually the presence of earlier inhabitants as thoroughly as Old English linguistically replaced Romano-Celtic languages in those areas. The presence of indigenous Romano-Celtic linguistic cultures that were Christianized long before those of the Anglo-Saxon realms, and which exerted a large continuing influence on the latter, was thus conveniently erased or subsumed.

In the emergence of this cultural Augustinianism, I will argue, we can see the roots of what W. J. T. Mitchell has called the Western imperial gaze, the objectification and possession of landscape through turning it into a distanced externality to be viewed in linear time as a kind of passing panorama reflecting only the concerns of human society.<sup>9</sup> This contrasts with the more iconographic approach to nature seen in the desert fathers and in Eastern Christian notions of divine energies that were developing in the early medieval period in the Byzantine cultural zone. These were paralleled in emphases of Celtic monasticism and related literary cultures, which were less directly influenced by the developing Augustinianism of the Western church seen in the Anglo-Saxon and Frankish realms.<sup>10</sup>

## BEDE'S BRITAIN: TEXT AND LANDSCAPE

The focus in this reading of *Beowulf* and the Guthlacian *Lives* is upon a cultural image of the physical environment that mediates between the human mind and nature, which is what is meant here by the term "landscape."<sup>11</sup>



That word itself, however, entered into modern English from Dutch only as a technical term for visual art that sought to capture the natural environment as object of the human gaze. Yet an earlier cognate, *landscape*, attested in one instance in the Anglo-Saxon *Genesis B* poem (and thus, because of the poem's origins, really an Old Saxon word), is defined by Bosworth and Toller as "a tract [or region] of land," thus conceptually related to notions of defining land for purposes of control.<sup>12</sup> In *Genesis B*, Satan says of hell, "ic a ne geseah laðran landscepe" ("I never have seen a more hostile landscape," lines 375–76).<sup>13</sup> This utterance could be taken as motto of the problems that the defining of landscape raised for the Anglo-Saxons' new literary culture after the papal mission of 597: How to relate their physical domains to their newly constructed culture as immigrant pagan conquerors who were also God's pilgrim Christian people in earthly exile? That question was answered by the Venerable Bede, at the twin monastic communities of Wearmouth-Jarrow in Northumbria, in his monumental *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, around 731.

Bede credited St. Augustine of Canterbury's mission, at the behest of Pope Gregory I, to convert the Anglo-Saxons from a base in Kent with introducing both Christianity and a Rome-centered ecclesiastical system to the Anglo-Saxon cultural zone. Not only was Anglo-Saxon culture then increasingly constructed (proudly) as of foreign extraction (of sturdy Germanic stock), by comparison with that of supposedly decadent native Celts to the north and west (in a motif set by the Romano-Celtic Gildas circa 500 but established in more ethnic terms by Bede),<sup>14</sup> but so too its church was described by Bede and other Anglo-Saxons as purely derived from Rome, in contrast with Celtic churches they saw as having schismatic or even heretical tendencies. In other words, the definition of Anglo-Saxon culture involved a certain distancing from non-Anglo-Saxon ancestral associations with the land in Britain, including native peoples and churches. In many ways, it was the very textualizing of the land of the Anglo-Saxons by Bede that made the Anglo-Saxon church and people a cultural entity. Whatever the real context and impact of the papal mission in 597, Bede made the coming of that mission foundational for the Anglo-Saxon people as a nation, and linked it by parallel structuring in his account to the coming of the Anglo-Saxons to Britain in fulfillment of a destiny as God's chosen people. As Colgrave and Mynors note, "he had one great aim":

It was to tell the story of the development of God's plan for the conversion of the English people and the building up of one united Church in the land.

He began by painting a background, geographical and historical, picturing the British inhabitants as feeble in time of war and, though Christian in name, vicious in time of peace, easily falling into heresies; but, worst of all, refusing to co-operate in the conversion of the "heathen Saxons." Then he plunges straight into the story of the mission of St. Augustine [of Canterbury] and its arrival in England.<sup>15</sup>

The opening of Bede's history describes in impressively empirical terms, which are yet at times laconically idyllic, a seemingly objective unitary view of Britain as a land awaiting its fulfillment in the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons:

Opima frugibus atque arboribus insula, et alendis apta pecoribus ac iumentis . . . fluitis quoque multum piscosis ac fontibus praeclara copiosis; et quidem praecipue issicio abundat ei anguilla.

The island is rich in crops and in trees, and has good pasturage for cattle and beasts of burden. . . . It is remarkable too for its rivers, which abound in fish, particularly salmon and eels, and for copious springs.<sup>16</sup>

In part his description is modeled on that of Gildas. However, while Bede's description of the island is longer and appears to be more factual, the realities of the coming of the Anglo-Saxons and the development of Christianity in Britain were in many respects far different from Bede's attempted reconstruction. If Bede's opening analysis of the islands is distinctively objective to modern readers by comparison with early medieval histories from the Irish and Welsh realms, his project is even more distinctive: Constructing a narrative unity of the Anglo-Saxon church and the pagan Anglo-Saxon invaders, Bede's history was itself a type of imposition of cultural landscape on Britain. The process by which his history created a monumental sense of English landscape, a cultural topography embodying the new identity of the Anglo-Saxons as a Christian pilgrim people,<sup>17</sup> is also reflected in the vernacular, ostensibly secular, narrative of *Beowulf*,<sup>18</sup> and in analogous elements of the *Lives* of the Anglo-Saxon St. Guthlac (probably written around the same period as the hero-epic, as argued below). Themes and issues related to landscape being expressed and worked out in these texts—historical, epic, and hagiographic—were similar in essence.

There were two primary and inter-related historical motivations in the constructed relation of Anglo-Saxon culture to its island: political, in terms



of the formation of an Anglo-Saxon polity in what is now England; and religious, in terms of development of ideological and ecclesiastical structures that reflected the formative role in Anglo-Saxon culture of the papal mission in 597. Both were in important ways colonial projects. According to revisionist historical and archaeological interpretations in recent years, the Germanic migration to Britain in the preceding invasion era, circa 410–550, was surprisingly small in terms of numbers: roughly 15,000 by one estimate, not more than five percent of the population of the island.<sup>19</sup> Yet Bede in his early eighth-century Anglo-Latin *Historia*, following in part on the ambiguous religious polemic of Gildas circa 500,<sup>20</sup> described this migration two centuries earlier as in effect a series of mass invasions—a notion challenged by recent historians and archaeologists who see the process as involving considerably more complex cultural change.<sup>21</sup> Bede described these pioneering Germanic migrants themselves as an ethnically varied collection of Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Frisians, and Franks; and thus even within his own rather neat depiction there are discrepancies: Other peoples or at least cultural influences besides Anglo-Saxons appear somewhat ambiguously at the start of his account of the founding of the Anglo-Saxon realms, and the archaeological record includes suggestions of influence from Scandinavia, as well as the likelihood again of a largely continuous indigenous population. Anglo-Saxon elites by Bede's time apparently needed to articulate a simpler new cultural landscape to legitimize their expanding regional dynasties.

Here the ideology of the papal missions was also formative. Both Pope Gregory I's focus on the chief Latin father Augustine, and his mission to the Anglo-Saxons, were part of his larger policy "of looking towards the West, towards the Latin world with its new masters, rather than waiting resentfully and often uselessly for help and attention from the Eastern Emperor."<sup>22</sup> That double-barreled project of developing a replacement for Byzantium in the West with a focus on Latin (rather than Greek) patristics continued among many of his successors, culminating in the papal crowning of Charlemagne as emperor in 800. "Augustine's legacy inspired the [Carolingian] period's most fundamental attempts to define a Christian European culture."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Augustine's downplaying of the role of nature in salvation, and his tendency to place it in an oppositional role with grace, paralleled an apparent desire of Western elites both to distance themselves from the fallen Roman Empire (represented in Britain by indigenous Romano-Celtic peoples and cultures) and to establish a new sense of authority on a spiritual basis that was legitimated by identification with the universal, imperial trappings of Rome as the papal seat.<sup>24</sup>

This new foundation for legitimacy in the West involved the authority of a literary formulation of nature or landscape. The fact that Anglo-Saxon culture was in some ways constructed by Bede and others as a *de novo* creation of the papal mission made it a center for this new ideology, even more so than the Frankish realms, which culturally negotiated establishment of a Westernized Christian culture with the Gallo-Roman remnant culture within their borders.<sup>25</sup> Anglo-Saxon cultural landscape was more hegemonic in original construction. As John Koch wrote: "... it is in political and intellectual developments of the seventh century [following the Gregorian mission] that we first see interests decisively polarize along English vs. non-English lines."<sup>26</sup>

Enabling this was the dichotomy of nature and grace that Augustinianism encouraged in the early medieval West, which involved the development of sign theory as a mediator between the two. The basis for this can be seen especially in Augustine's major works, *De Doctrines Christiana*, *De Trinitate*, and *De Civitate Dei*. Theophanies, such as appearances of God in the Old Testament or of the Holy Spirit as a dove in the New, were explained as temporal events, one-time miraculous physical creations that subsequently vanished.<sup>27</sup> Augustine's difficulty in articulating the relationship between nature and grace, and his emphasis on a solely relational role of the Holy Spirit to the other members of the Trinity (in effect subordinating the Spirit to the Son), encouraged a view of signs (including divine manifestations) as not having meaning in themselves, while at the same time paradoxically being objectified by their associations with the physical world.<sup>28</sup> His discussion of the connection between time and grammar also encouraged a systematic distinction of both symbols and creation from the divine,<sup>29</sup> an issue with origins in the pre-Christian Greek philosophy and classical Latin rhetoric that Augustine had studied as a youth. It was in this somewhat autonomous emerging symbolic realm of thought that Western approaches to landscape were forged in Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian courts. In the textualizing, and resulting distancing, of the natural and the spiritual, Augustine's writings helped shape the theme of environmental utilitarianism so important in Western culture,<sup>30</sup> which emerged early in Anglo-Saxon literature for reasons of political ideology.<sup>31</sup>

## MERCIA: TEXTUALIZING A LANDSCAPE

The cultural identity of Anglo-Saxon Mercia as a kingdom and as a people was still a work in progress in the eighth century when the *Lives* of Guthlac

were composed under Mercian political hegemony, and this has important implications for the literary landscapes associated with it and their related religious ideology. David Dumville notes that "Mercia seems to have been by a substantial margin the latest of the major kingdoms [described in Bede's history of the Anglo-Saxon realms] to come together as a single unit." The fact that "the political unit came together relatively late may even help to explain why we have no annals or chronicle for the Midlands. At the time when such a record might first have been created, there was no single Midland unit or dynasty to give coherence or focus."<sup>32</sup> While Nicholas Higham argues that circumstantial evidence points to continuity of a political entity in the Midlands from sub-Roman times,<sup>33</sup> even so Mercia would have marked the last major area of Anglo-Saxon culture to establish its identity as such. Its name derived from an Old English word (*myrce*) for border-land. Under Offa in the late eighth century, it built the dyke that physically defined the boundary between Anglo-Saxon and Welsh cultures. It was the last of the major Anglo-Saxon polities to allegedly sport a pagan king (Penda). Under Offa it also lobbied successfully for its own distinct ecclesiastical jurisdiction. There are also indications, described below, of a continuity of identifiable Celtic polities or populations relatively late in the Midlands region that constituted Mercia, some of them possibly included in the patchwork of Midlands sub-kingdom lists in the Tribal Hidage. It was, in short, in many ways the ultimate Anglo-Saxon kingdom *ex nihilo*, with a recently constructed Germanic and Christian cultural and political identity, and forming in its domination of Southumbria the geopolitical center of what would become modern England. Establishing the identity of the Mercian land would be an important project of literary narrative in the realm's passage from borderland to heartland, especially given the links between Anglo-Saxon elite political circles and monastic establishments producing literary works, as described by Patrick Wormald.<sup>34</sup>

Felix's Latin *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, written circa 721–749, is dedicated to the East Anglian King Ælfrwald and favorably depicts the region's contemporary Mercian over-king Æthelbald. Felix recounts the life of the warrior scion of a Mercian noble family who ends up living in the wilds of Middle Anglia as a Christian holy man. There are a number of landscape-related analogues between this earliest *vita* of Guthlac and *Beowulf*, which are often cited in arguments that the latter was also of eighth-century Mercian provenance.<sup>35</sup> In each of these texts, a monumental mound has a climactic role in marking territory with memory for newcomers, in contrast to the prior presence of native-dwellers. Fiends attacking Guthlac's mound include

Welsh-speaking spirits, apparently ghosts of the region's indigenous people associated in Felix's text with contemporary Welsh-Mercian battles. They, like the monstrous inhabitants of the mere in *Beowulf*, are labeled by Felix as "sons of Cain." Sam Newton catalogued specific analogues that involve fiendish figures associated with the natural landscape:

Felix's depiction of Guthlac's demonic opponents shows notable similarities in some respects to the depiction of Grendel and his mother in *Beowulf*. In both works, the heroes exorcise specific places haunted by fen-dwelling demons who are angered initially by a particular type of song. Grendel, who is *eald-gewinna*, "the old enemy" (line 1776a), and *feond moncynnes*, "the enemy of mankind" (line 164b), begins the haunting of the newly-built hall of Heorot after he hears there the sound of the song of Creation (lines 86–101). Similarly, Felix refers to the *antiquus hostis prolis humanae*, "ancient foe of the human race," beginning to trouble Guthlac as he sings psalms and hymns at his newly-built hermitage in a burial-mound on the island of Crowland (chap. 29). Furthermore, the fiends who subsequently attack Guthlac are addressed by the saint as the "seed of Cain" (chap. 31). This reference to fiends as descendants of Cain does not appear in any of the later Old English poetic versions of *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* and yet exactly the same monstrous pedigree is attributed to Grendel and his kind in *Beowulf* (lines 102–114, 1261b–1265a).<sup>36</sup>

The several *Lives* of Guthlac provide a spectrum from literal to more allegorical style in descriptions of the landscape, from the relatively circumstantial Latin account of Felix to the Old English prose version and homily fragment that follow it fairly closely with respect to landscape issues (except as noted below), to the poetic versions A and B, the latter especially evidencing an allegorical emphasis as will be discussed soon.<sup>37</sup> The exact dates and sequences of these texts are not known, however, although the provenance of the Latin version is fairly well established by clues within the text. Writing at a time when, judging by Bede's comments about the British church, ecclesiastical tempers still ran high over perceived Celtic heterodoxy on tonsures and especially the dating of Easter (the Welsh were not in compliance with Rome on that jurisdictionally defining issue until 768), Felix took a stance that, to use Koch's phraseology, decidedly defined himself as "English vs. non-English,"<sup>38</sup> and created an Anglo-Saxon landscape to match. Felix takes care to describe how Guthlac had a Petrine tonsure and later quotes a report of "pseudo-anchoritae" among the Irish



(chapters 20 and 46).<sup>39</sup> In addition, he refers in chapter 34 to an attack on Guthlac at the barrow by Welsh-speaking spirits at a time when the Britons, "infesti hostes Saxonici generis," were attacking and pillaging (presumably the Mercian Midlands) during the reign of Coenred of the Mercians. Felix apparently forgot in his heated labeling of them as "implacable enemies of the Saxon race" (Colgrave's translation) that in the days of Coenred's grandfather Penda's hegemony, the Britons had been key allies of developing Mercia.<sup>40</sup> In fact, Penda's alliances with Welsh Christian rulers and his apparent willingness to allow his children to be baptized, together with Bede's general neglect of the presence of the British church,<sup>41</sup> raise the question of whether his alleged paganism itself may have been a smear by later Anglo-Saxon writers due to his association with British Christianity.

At any rate, it is possible that negative attitudes toward the Welsh and Irish in Felix's narrative reflect concerns about Anglo-Saxon national identity among the Mercians related not only to the kingdom's position on the border with Wales, but also to the presence of British populations in Mercia, and the relatively short time in which the realm had been Germanic in character. Early twentieth-century scholars such as the Celtist John Rhys first raised the possibility that, given the cultural milieu of seventh-century Mercia, Guthlac himself (as well as the Mercian royal line of which he was a distant relation) could have been descended from native British populations.<sup>42</sup> Felix gives Guthlac's father's name as Penwall, or Penwallh, a name seeming to have components of the Welsh *pen* (meaning "head" or "chief") plus an ending that could be related to Anglo-Saxon words for native inhabitants that evolved into the word Welsh, meaning originally "alien" or "stranger."<sup>43</sup> Sims-Williams recently suggested that "some British alliance or intermarriage may be implied" by the elements of the name.<sup>44</sup>

The apparent continuation of a Roman-British name for the kingdom of Lindsey (Lincolnshire), along with archaeological evidence for post-Roman survival of a British population in the Lincoln area and a British name in the genealogy of the kings of Lindsey,<sup>45</sup> are all indications of a lingering presence of indigenous culture in the regions neighboring the Mercian-dominated fenlands of Middle and East Anglia. Such indications are also in line with evidence cited by Hope-Taylor, and by Koch, that parts of what became the kingdom of Northumbria were British polities taken over wholesale by Anglo-Saxon warriors, with populations relatively intact, and Higham's theory of possible post-Roman political continuity in the Midlands.<sup>46</sup> Such continuity underlines the constructed nature of Anglo-Saxon (and especially Anglian Mercian) ethnicity (and hence landscape) in this period.<sup>47</sup>

The emergence of the Anglo-Saxon over-kingships described by Bede, however, together with the accompanying ecclesiastical consolidation advanced by Archbishop Theodore in the late seventh century,<sup>48</sup> seem to have led to the more differentiated ethnic consciousness found in Bede's *History*, written circa 731, and in Felix's *Vita*. There is no specific archaeological or place-name evidence indicating the survival of a distinct native British population within the Fens as Arthur Gray and others suggest Felix's account indicates. Yet, as Dumville notes, the Middle Anglians were not cited as a single people in the Tribal Hidage, and seem to have been a "creation by the Mercians in the mid-seventh century of a convenient unit representing an agglomeration of formerly independent peoples of varying sizes and relative importance."<sup>49</sup> Among the neighbors of this "agglomeration," to their north lay Lindsey, again a polity of probable Celtic provenance, and to the southwest, the Hwicce, also potentially Celtic in origin. Guthlac himself is described by Felix as having been an exile among the Britons for a time (chap. 34).

Such issues of ethnicity are relevant to descriptions of the Fens in Felix as a last refuge for the demonic spirits he associates with the Britons, as well as to the description of the landscape of the Fens themselves. In chapter 24, we are told in Virgilian terms:

Est in medullaneis Britanniae partibus immensae magnitudinis aterrima palus . . . nunc stagnis, nunc flactris, interdum nigris fusi vaporis laticibus, necnon et crebris insularum nemorumque intervenientibus flexuosis rivigarum anfractibus, ab austro in aquilonem mare tenus longissimo tractu protenditur.

There is in the midland district of Britain a most dismal fen of immense size [that] stretches from the south as far north as the sea. . . a very long tract, now consisting of marshes, now of bogs, sometimes of black waters overhung by fog, sometimes studded with wooded islands and traversed by the windings of tortuous streams.<sup>50</sup>

Then we are told (chap. 25) that Guthlac finds his way with help from a guide who

scisse aliam insulam in abditis remotioris heremi partibus confitebatur, quam multi inhabitare temtantes propter incognita heremi monstra et diversarum formarum terrores reprobaverant.



declared that he knew a certain island in the more remote and hidden parts of that desert; many had attempted to dwell there, but had rejected it on account of the unknown portents of the desert and its terrors of various shapes.<sup>51</sup>

Guthlac travels (still chap. 25) in a fisherman's skiff with his guide (an image at once a bit reminiscent of classical journeys to Hades, Odinic-guide appearances in Norse literature, and, probably most relevantly here, Andreas's heavenly/disguised boat guide in that saint's Old English hagiographical poem),

per in via lustra inter atrae paludis margines Christo viatore ad praedictum locum usque pervenit; Crugland dicitur, insula media in palude posita quae ante paucis propter remotioris heremi solitudinem inculta vix nota habebatur. Nullus hanc ante famulum Christi Guthlacum solus habitare colonus valebat, propter videlicet illic demorantium fantasias demonum, in qua vir Dei Guthlac, contempto hoste, caelesti auxilio adiutus, inter umbrosa solitudinis nemora solus habitare coepit.

traveling with Christ, through trackless bogs within the confines of the dismal marsh till he came to the said spot; it is called Crowland, an island in the middle of the marsh which on account of the wildness of this very remote desert had hitherto remained untillied and known to a very few. No settler had been able to dwell alone in this place before Guthlac the servant of Christ, on account of the phantoms of demons which haunted it. Here Guthlac, the man of God, despising the enemy, began by divine aid to dwell alone among the shady groves of this solitude.<sup>52</sup>

In *Guthlac A*, we are told that the demonic residents of the barrow-island came there weary to rest for a while, enjoying the temporary quiet granted to them in that wild place (lines 205–16a). While that has explicit parallels to the plight of devils exiled by God (and, as will be discussed later, to that of the Irish Tuatha Dé Danann), the sinister description of the Fens and its inhabitants also bears comparison to the foreboding landscape described by early Pilgrims arriving in New England (i.e., William Bradford's journal). The latter, like the account of Guthlac, recounts "alien" landscape. In fact, one of the ways in which the spirits try to terrorize Guthlac is by telling him that there won't be anyone to feed him in the middle of a bog (line 274), sounding much like the view of wetlands taken by Euro-Americans until

recently. The view of the Fens is much how one imagines the perspective of a culture constructing itself as both dominant and imposed, viewing a "backward" indigenous people living in an ecosystem that is not compatible with the emerging polity's imposition of order, and thus not well understood.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, contrary to a sense of these wetlands as a primeval wilderness, there are archaeological traces in part of the Fens of drainage and dense settlement in Romano-British times.<sup>54</sup> The notion that wetlands could easily have been a place of refuge for indigenous people in early medieval Britain is also suggested later in the purportedly ninth-century biography of Alfred by the Welsh cleric Asser, which tells of Alfred's own exile from the Vikings at a site in the Athelney Marshes of the West Country, described as "surrounded by swampy, impassable and extensive marshland and groundwater on every side," where Alfred later endowed a monastery,<sup>55</sup> and also perhaps by the Old English poem *The Wife's Lament*.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the central temptation of Guthlac by the spirits of the place in *Guthlac A* is to tell him that he needs to return to his own people, his own community (line 291).

The central historical conflict that can be seen as roiling the landscape of the different Guthlacian narratives relates to the tension between that new ecclesiastical-political order of the Anglo-Saxons and oppositionally framed indigenous ancestral connotations of the land.<sup>57</sup> In this context, Guthlac's exorcism of the Fens parallels readings of Beowulf's foray into the Grendelcyn's mere as the exorcism of an earlier indigenous culture.<sup>58</sup> Certainly the harsh description of the Grendelcyn mere in *Beowulf* seems to bear comparison to Felix's description of the Fens, and the inhabitants of the mere to Celtic-speaking demons of the fenlands. (Other analogues again, cited by Newton, include the way in which "the heroes exorcise specific places haunted by fen-dwelling demons who are angered initially by a particular type of song" that is biblically related, and how foes are described as descendants of Cain,<sup>59</sup> like the Tuatha Dé Danann of Irish legend stuck between heaven and hell, inhabiting haunted mounds.)

The descriptions of the saint's early home as a barrow in a grove in the Fens in *Guthlac A* (line 429), as a mysterious and inhospitable island grove with a barrow in Felix, and as an island in *Guthlac B* (line 507), are all reminiscent of Insular traditions of sacred islands that parallel pre-Christian Germanic tradition. However, in the Guthlac and *Beowulf* narratives (the latter included if considering the mere cave as a type of otherworldly island), this native cultural landscape is described in hostile, alien terms.<sup>60</sup> Comparing Celtic and Anglo-Saxon poetic approaches to the natural world, Neville notes of the Old English poems on Guthlac:

When the demons come to see *hwæðre him þæs wonges wyn sweðrade*, "whether the joy of that place had dwindled for him" after their assaults, they find that *wæs him botles neod*, "his home was a pleasure to him," rather like the forests and coastlands that often inspired Irish poets. If Guthlac had been commemorated by an Irish poet, it appears likely that the poem would have contained the kind of detailed praise of birds and plants expressed in "Manchán's Wish." *Guthlac*, however, contains almost no description of the land, water, vegetation and animal life that help to make the saint's home so pleasant for him. Old English poets appear not to have been inspired to use the representation of the natural world in the same way as Irish poets, even when describing similar circumstances of comfort and joy. Instead, Old English poets reserve the representation of the natural world for use as a force to oppose and test their saints' resolve and powers of resistance.<sup>61</sup>

It is not as if pre-Christian Germanic traditions did not contain their own pleasant associations with sacred natural areas.<sup>62</sup> But the response of Anglo-Saxon Christian literary culture to such traditions differs greatly in its representation of landscape from Welsh and Irish literary practices. While all the Insular cultures in this period were undergoing to a degree the process of political centralization, the difference for Anglo-Saxon culture, relating directly to construction of landscape, lay again in the latter's need to form a new unified ethnic identity that was also ecclesiastical in nature. Significantly, Felix's account begins by citing Gregory I on the uses and limitations of words, a reminder of the key influence of Augustinian semiotics and cosmology both on the Anglo-Saxon literary world.<sup>63</sup>

Traveling through landscape is traveling through ancestry, and the shadowy ethnic context for Felix's *Vita* is backdrop to the central place of the barrow. Judging by early medieval Irish and Welsh literature, mounds were entry points to the indigenous Otherworld that were also identified with earlier inhabitants of the landscape and with control of the cultural landscape of imagination. Irish legends associate mounds such as the Neolithic Newgrange in the Boyne Valley with earlier inhabitants of the island.<sup>64</sup> In the Welsh *Mabinogi* is found the Mound of Arberth (modern-day Narberth, a name meaning "by the oaks," perhaps originally a reference to a sacred grove), another apparent portal into the Otherworld, where for example Manawydan and friends see the placing of a curse on the landscape, and whence the curse is later lifted.<sup>65</sup>

The Anglo-Saxons, too, seem to have had traditions associating mounds with a mythic Otherworld, although apart from later Old Icelandic descrip-

tions of the World Tree and connecting worlds, we don't have any narratives indicating their pre-Christian cosmology.<sup>66</sup> Yet a pattern of political meaning attached to mounds stretches back apparently to include both pre-*adventus* and Anglo-Saxon examples.<sup>67</sup> John Shephard found that the location of isolated Anglo-Saxon barrows indicated "the burial of an individual, or small group of individuals who were members of a superordinate social rank, the status position being ascribed rather than achieved."<sup>68</sup> The development of such barrows in otherwise flat-grave cemeteries with Germanic-style accoutrements began amid the pagan Anglo-Saxon culture of the mid-sixth century and is described by Shephard as "a means of establishing the social system through the evolution of hierarchic regulators."

In this prehistoric coding of landscape monuments, which in a sense is appropriated and transformed by the Guthlac texts, an isolated barrow such as Guthlac's was a sign that resources were being claimed by a particular heir or family. Shephard relates a pattern of such barrows to development of a strongly centralized manorial system in the medieval Midlands,<sup>69</sup> as contrasted with the *gavelkind*<sup>70</sup> landholding system in Kent where barrows were more commonly grouped in cemeteries. This regional difference is probably another sign of the relative late development of a unified Anglo-Saxon identity for the Mercian polity, as compared with the kingdom of Kent, which with its close ties to the Frankish monarchy was the host of the original Augustinian mission (and whose name probably is of Romano-Celtic origin, indicating a relatively early transition to Anglo-Saxon rule). In any case, scholarship on Anglo-Saxon boundary charters also suggests the use of mounds from various eras as property markers: The *Codex Diplomaticus* includes the description of 150 barrows along the edge of an estate, for example.<sup>71</sup>

While pagan Anglo-Saxons may have derived their limited barrow-building habit from earlier prehistoric examples in the British landscape,<sup>72</sup> the construction of the earliest barrows has in turn been related to an agrarian cultural reorientation of the British landscape:

The ancestral powers and meanings in the landscape now became actively appropriated by individuals and groups through the construction and use of chambered tombs, long cairns and long barrows. . . . Ancestral powers now became double. The tombs presented and marked out the bones of the ancestral dead in the landscape. In so doing they visibly brought the presence of the ancestral past to consciousness. Their specific morphological characteristics and their landscape settings also served to relate the bones



of previous generations to a more generalized ancestral power embodied in the topography and symbolic geography of place and paths of movements which had already been constructed in the Mesolithic. The location of important points in the external world became captured in the orientation of morphological features of the monuments and their placement in the landscape. Their settings were deliberately chosen to fix a certain vantage point in relation to perception of the world beyond. During the Mesolithic the significance of place was understood in terms of its setting in the landscape. In the Neolithic this was reversed—the landscape was now understood in terms of its relation to the setting of the monuments.<sup>73</sup>

By the eighth century, however, the monuments were being understood in terms of their relation to written texts such as the *vitae* of Guthlac and *Beowulf*. Ancestral powers were in a sense trebled, to extend Christopher Tilley's figure of speech. Earlier they had been extended by the creation of physical monuments with functions as regional landscape markers. Now, in written texts, they were related to a more transcendental system of religion and statehood than that which had been possible in non-literate society, and thus strengthened into a new sense of ethnic identity. There are analogies to the earlier process of conversion described by Barbara Rosenwein in Gaul: "In the ancient world the countryside had been, as people of the time understood it, populated by deities. These were transformed into demons in the early Christian period. But by the end of the sixth century, the countryside had become sacred once again, purged by the presence of dispersed and carefully housed relics of saints."<sup>74</sup> A significant difference between the process in Mercia and in Gaul, suggested by the treatment of landscape in the Guthlac narratives as well as historical and archaeological evidence, is that this process had already occurred much earlier in Britain, only to be layered over by another pattern of Christianization of the landscape. When the Anglo-Saxon establishment of culture occurred, it was done through a centralized organizational vehicle (the papal mission, its Augustinian doctrine, and its royal connections) and in sharp opposition to the already indigenous Christian culture, rather than the complex engagement of Gallo-Romans and Franks in post-Roman Gaul.

Read as part of an examination of the role of the hagiographic genre and its conventions in the textual process of formulating an Anglo-Saxon land and identity in the borderlands of Mercia, early medieval narratives of saints from other Insular cultures—together with the archetypal Life of the Egyptian desert father St. Antony—often present a different approach

to landscape than that presented in the Guthlacian tradition. Felix's Anglo-Latin account of Guthlac's life has analogues in both Athanasius's account of Antony's life, which includes the saint's battling with demons in a tomb, and in St. Jerome's description of a hermitage built over a cistern in a shady grove.<sup>75</sup> This, however, makes the differences from Athanasius's descriptions of landscape relative to St. Antony only more striking. In the Egyptian Thebaid, we are told:

The monasteries in the hills were like tents filled with heavenly choirs, singing, studying, fasting, praying, rejoicing for the hope of the life to come, laboring in order to give alms, having love and harmony among themselves. And in truth it was like a land of religion and justice to see, a land apart. For neither wronger nor wronged was there; nor plaint of tax-gathering; but a multitude of ascetics, all with one purpose to virtue; so that, looking back on the monasteries and on so fair an array of monks, one cried aloud saying (Num. 24.5): *How lovely are thy dwellings, O Jacob, thy tents O Israel; like shady groves, and like a garden by a river, and like tents that the Lord hath pitched, and like cedars beside the waters.*<sup>76</sup>

And when Antony goes to the inner desert to escape the crowds, we are told:

Antony, as though moved by God, fell in love with the place; for this was the place indicated by the voice that spoke to him at the river-bank. At the beginning he got bread from his fellow-travelers and abode alone on the hill, none other being with him; for he kept the place from then on as one who has found again his own home. The Saracens themselves, who had seen Antony's earnestness, used to travel by that way on purpose and were glad to bring him bread . . .<sup>77</sup>

Aided by those people of the desert, Antony when in the tomb fights demons that are identified as aerial by nature, not associated with the land. The love he expresses for the land and the successful human community described as part of it during his life stand in contrast to Felix's account of the ex-warrior Guthlac, for whom the landscape comes to bloom after his fight against the demons with their Welsh associations, but is not finally transformed until after his death, when no human community is described there. Guthlac goes to heaven, and the barrow is virtually an empty tomb, a literary cenotaph.



Guthlac's reported background as a plunderer-warrior, in an Anglo-Saxon culture whose most distinctive qualities of historical identification before its conversion had been military, and his Christian war against the demons, relates in martial spirit to the Christian warrior themes in Willibald's late eighth-century Anglo-Latin life of St. Boniface, in which a climactic moment comes when Boniface destroys a giant oak identified with pagan worship.<sup>78</sup> Contrast such Anglo-Saxon hagiographic taking-possession of the landscape with Muirchú's late seventh-century Hiberno-Latin account of St. Patrick, in which the Irish saint obtains possession of the hill at Armagh for a Christian city after the miraculous death of a domesticated horse, followed by Patrick's saving the life of a wild fawn that shows where a church altar would be located (the horse belonged to a villainous lord who would not cede the hill because he kept his prized horse there). Patrick and company ascended the hill after it was given them to survey the land,

and found there a deer with its little fawn lying in the place where now the altar is. . . . Patrick's companions wanted to catch and kill the fawn, but the saint did not want this to happen and would not permit it. Instead, the saint himself took hold of the fawn and carried it in his arms and the deer followed him like a loving lamb until he set the fawn free in another valley on the northern side of Armagh. There even today, as those who know about these things relate, some signs of his power still remain.<sup>79</sup>

One more example is especially relevant to Guthlac, both because of its apparent influence on Felix's writing and also because it is by an author who was instrumental in developing Anglo-Saxon historical identity in the early eighth century: Bede's life of St. Cuthbert. Catherine Cubitt writes of the narrative's "strongly ideological character" that transformed the seventh-century Cuthbert "from a figure whose sanctity was rooted in Irish practices to one whose *vita* could be used as a vehicle for Romanizing propaganda."<sup>80</sup> Part of this transformation involves a dramatic change in the use of topography and landscape as compared with an earlier anonymous *vita* of the saint by a monk at the Celtic foundation at Lindisfarne. In the earlier work, described by Cubitt as "snapshot" in its relatively non-linear narrative style, incidents "are often very precisely located, naming the villages and regions in which miracles happen."<sup>81</sup> Bede's account uses a framework of a "coherent narrative" with "explanation, causation and context," but omits "virtually all of the geographical material" found in the earlier work.<sup>82</sup> It creates a totalizing narrative overlay.

Cubitt places the context of such Anglo-Saxon hagiography in a line with the didactic approach of its spiritual father, Gregory I, in his famous *Dialogues*. Gregory's allegorization of nature in works such as his commentary on Job was an important influence on Anglo-Saxon literature. It used Augustinian ideas but went further. In an era when Christianity did not face the intellectual challenges of Augustine's time in both late antiquity and the period of the fall of Rome, Gregory did not seem to engage all the theoretical nuances and qualifications found in the writings of his spiritual mentor. Before pursuing analysis of landscape motifs in texts from the Gregorian-influenced Anglo-Saxon literary culture, it is worth considering R. A. Markus's summation of Gregory's allegorizing approach to physical creation:

Gregory used the Pauline verse "The letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3.6) only to justify the exegetical freedom to interpret texts allegorically. Augustine, though he had also understood it in this sense, came in later life to be more reserved both about allegory and the use of the verse to justify it. That reserve is altogether alien to Gregory. Much more than Augustine, Gregory is ready to jump from the letter to its spiritual meaning; and equally he is much more ready to make the leap from the material universe to its Maker. Commenting on the verse "Who does not know the hand of the Lord has done this?" (Job 12.9), Gregory wrote: ". . . all proclaim God to be the creator of all. . . . This may also be understood literally [*iuxta solam speciem litterae*]: for each creature when looked at gives as it were its own testimony, [by means of] the very form it has [*ipsam quam habet speciem suam*]. Cattle, birds, the earth or fish, if we ask them while we look, reply with one voice that the Lord made everything. While they imprint their form [*species*] on our senses they proclaim that they are not from themselves. By the very fact that they are created, they proclaim by the form they manifest [*per ostensam speciem*] their creator: [this is] as it were the voice of their confession. . . ." (*Moralia* xi.4.6)

A famous passage of Augustine's *Confessions* is so like Gregory's that it is hard to imagine that Gregory did not have it at the back of his mind: "I asked the sea, the deeps, the living creatures that creep, and they responded: 'We are not your God, look beyond us.' . . . And with a great voice they cried out: 'He made us' (Ps. 99.3). My question was the attention I gave to them, and their response was their *species*" (*Confessions* x.6.9, trans. Chadwick). A comparison, however, quickly reveals a characteristic contrast between

the two writers. Augustine immediately catches himself: "... the created order speaks to all, but is understood by those who hear its outward voice and compare it with the truth within themselves."

This is something that is altogether missing in Gregory. He does not doubt that it will indeed be evident to all that creatures point to the Creator: for him they are transparent without any need to question and to judge the creatures' response.<sup>83</sup>

Such an approach of allegorization of the physical world commended itself to nascent Christian Anglo-Saxon realms like Mercia on grounds of both ecclesiastical genealogy (traced back by Bede and others to Gregory) and the political necessity of defining a sovereign identity for the state. The basic problem of Mercia and the West at large, in terms of development of a Christian landscape, was threefold: lack of a unifying Christian empire, of historic biblical holy places, and in the Anglo-Saxon realms (among others) the lack of prominent and long-lived ascetic traditions associated with place, such as the Egyptian Thebaid of the desert fathers or the islands of Irish monks.<sup>84</sup> There was also the influence of Augustinian semiotics, in which "the reader" became the dominant model of the "reflective self."<sup>85</sup> The resulting Anglo-Saxon textualized sense of space was oriented not around ancestral monuments and traditions of an Otherworld encompassing nature and the human world both,<sup>86</sup> but around a politically controlled literacy whose linearity cut through native ancestral space with the point of a pen. It is a pattern of cultural seizure of Insular landscape that involves not so much demolition of the indigenous Otherworld that once encompassed it, as a taking possession of that Otherworld in the name of consolidating royal and ecclesiastical power. In this, the process of monumentalizing landscape through text is in line with Pope Gregory I's instructions to his English mission, to ritually cleanse and then re-use pagan sites as needed to convert the English, "not accommodation, but ... appropriation ... an effort to claim existing pagan sacred sites for Christianity."<sup>87</sup> In Britain, it could also be an effort to claim indigenous Christian sites for papal Christianity, as in the case of conducting worship in Kent at the site of an old Romano-British church.

The on-the-ground hegemonic effect of Anglo-Saxon appropriation of the landscape is suggested by Stancilffe's interpretation of Gregory's attitude toward the British cult of St. Sixtus. Relics of the Roman St. Sixtus were sent at Augustine of Canterbury's request to discourage the native cult, but

were to be enshrined in a different place than that of the British Sixtus's tomb, which was then to be closed to prevent people from venerating "uncertain" remains.<sup>88</sup> Yet perhaps the most potent indicator of the nature of Anglo-Saxon landscape is the dearth, relative to early Irish and Welsh texts, of detailed descriptions of the natural world and its features in extant Old English and Anglo-Latin writings. Cultural topography of emerging Angles-land was to be found in texts of Christian Anglo-Saxon culture, in allegorized form. The new literary monumentalizing was ultimately totalizing in intent, seeking as it did to control the narrative of land, ancestry, and identity through written text in which engagement with the physical land became increasingly symbolic and relative to a more transcendent spiritual cosmos and polity.

### THE HAUNTED BARROW

The thematic motif of the battle for the haunted barrow in the Guthlac narratives and *Beowulf* can be taken as a metaphor of the Anglo-Saxon literary construction of the landscape of Britain. It is, as noted, an application of a Gregorian papal lesson to the landscape, an appropriation of ancestry. And it is a conquest that takes place in a literate symbolic realm. It is further argued below that the *Guthlac B* poem's discussion of the soul and body represents an extension of the haunted barrow into a more directly Christian allegorical realm, a metaphor for Augustinian church ideology as well.

The image of the haunted barrow itself, specifically the dragon and his hoard found in *Beowulf*, but with analogues in the treasure-raided and demon-infested barrow described by Felix,<sup>89</sup> relates to folkloric associations of barrows with ancestors or earlier (and now supernatural) inhabitants of the land.<sup>90</sup> In Old English poetry, burial mounds with treasure were described as dragon hills.<sup>91</sup> H.R. Ellis Davidson cites Norse analogues in suggesting that the description in *Beowulf* that the dragon had lain in the mound 300 years before a thief arrived "is a rationalization of the idea (which would be repugnant to a Christian audience) that the dead man himself became a dragon."<sup>92</sup> In any case, we do know that there were direct connections in both Celtic and Germanic tradition between standing on a mound, in effect possessing it symbolically, and taking possession of (or alternately, uniting with) the landscape.<sup>93</sup> In the Welsh story of *Pwyll*, the male ruler of the land ascends the mound and thus finds the goddess of the land with whom he mates, a necessity for the fertility of the land also in Irish tradition. Likewise



in Norse sagas, a king dispensing justice or claiming his royal inheritance might do so sitting on a burial mound, and in early medieval Wales there are recorded instances of a king granting land to a church while within or on the tomb of a former king.<sup>94</sup>

In the Anglo-Saxon realms, "tumuli were often used, and continued to be used until well on into Christian times, as meeting places for political assemblies and for transacting the business of the Anglo-Saxon hundreds," and thus had ritual associations, and even remained in rural areas "potential locations for the continuation or revival of forbidden pagan practices."<sup>95</sup> Davidson makes the case that Guthlac is assuming the ancestral powers of the mound, whose infesting spirits she describes as reflecting "the pagan tradition of the dead in the grave-mound, and that these creatures are its inhabitants," hence appropriately speaking the British language of the ancients. And although the real estate does not seem choice from Felix's description, Guthlac is envied and the target for an attempted assassination by a priest wishing to take his place on the mound. "There seems little doubt that a man who could keep his place upon the mound . . . would in fact be the Christian successor of those pagan seers who sat upon the mounds for inspiration."<sup>96</sup> Guthlac's own supposed words on this topic, as recorded in the A poem, lines 383–86, suggest the situation has some prestige:

Nis pisses beorges setl  
meodumre ne mara þonne hit men duge  
se þe in þrowingum þeodnes willan  
dæghwam dreogeð.

The abode on this mountain is not more excellent nor greater than serves for a man who daily in tribulations performs the will of God.<sup>97</sup>

Marking the mound with a cross (lines 179–83) was part of the warrior saint's taking of the landscape, reminiscent of conquistadors later laying claim to a "New World" by erecting crosses (although here the irony is that it was already a Christianized land).

Although in examining the barrow image in the Guthlacian *Lives* we are dealing with a presentation of legendary "fact," there is nothing left on the ground of any barrow at the Crowland site,<sup>98</sup> and the pedigree of such a monument remains a mystery.<sup>99</sup> The presence of a barrow at Crowland would fit the distribution of Romano-British barrows better than that of prehistoric burial chambers. But Glyn Daniel, noting recorded instances of

people living in "burial chambers," admits that Guthlac's home conceivably could have been a Neolithic passage tomb as well, given that "it is only in some of the Roman barrows in England that chambers occur."<sup>100</sup>

The approach of the A poet to the landscape is more general than Felix's, with no description of the Fens, not even the few details about the cistern and hut and plundered treasure that Felix provides, and no mention of raids by Britons or Celtic-speaking demons. The absence of the latter may be part of the phenomenon of a less critical approach to native traditions in vernacular as opposed to Latin texts,<sup>101</sup> perhaps related to the degree to which clerics identified with a sense of ecclesiastical *Romanitas*, although it also may reflect a later political-ecclesiastical context in which the processes of both allegorization of the landscape and Mercian political hegemony were better established. In any case, the landscape of battle in *Guthlac A* generally seems more formally allegorical than Felix's *Vita*, functioning in what Lawrence Shook calls "the symbolic mode" in which the barrow comes to

stand for all that is significant in the spiritual life of the good Christian: grace, struggle, the Will of God, temporal perseverance, and eternal salvation. His use of the barrow removes it from the category of a mere geographical appendage to a religious theme and makes it the center of the poem as a poem.<sup>102</sup>

In response, Paul Reichardt sought to use this same argument to argue for a return to the translation of *beorg* as mountain, being more appropriate to the "symbolic mode" of the poem and its setting in "a spiritual landscape as much as a geographical one."<sup>103</sup> Thus the meaning of mountain has important symbolic associations for a monastic readership in relation to biblical imagery. But citing evidence of continued strength of paganism in the medieval English countryside after the time of Guthlac, Karl Wentersdorf argued in response to Reichardt that the centrality of the *beorg* translated as a "barrow" in the poem is appropriate given efforts by the Anglo-Saxon church to follow Gregory's advice to transform pagan sacred sites to Christian uses, in order to help bring the population closer to Christ.<sup>104</sup> The site was a *mearcloond* (line 174a) in terms of spiritual as well as human jurisdictional boundaries, "a disputed borderland where the followers of God and Satan clashed,"<sup>105</sup> described in a term used for pagan Mermedonia in the Old English poem *Andreas*. In the poem, Guthlac "intended primarily to establish and visibly demonstrate possession of the barrow for the Church."<sup>106</sup> The apposite meanings of *beorg*, pagan and Christian, were



probably part of the intent of a poet whose theme rode a *mearc* land between different British landscapes.<sup>107</sup>

In the response of the natural landscape to the saint's victories over the demons in *Guthlac A* (lines 732b–45a), we can see most clearly the implications of Guthlac's taking possession of the land, and the meaning of this perceptual grid of ownership for the cultural topography of Anglo-Saxon sovereignty:

Sigehreðig cwom  
byrla to þam beorge. Hine bletsadon  
monga mægwlitas, meaglum reordum,  
treofugla tudor, tacnum cyððon  
eadges efcyne.  
...  
Smolt wæs se sigewong ond sele niwe,  
fæger fugla reord, Folde geblowen;  
geacas gear budon.

The builder returned triumphantly to the mound; many species of creatures blessed him; with loud songs and signs, swarms of birds in the trees announced his return. . . . Peaceful was his new home on the field of victory and pleasant was the singing of the birds; the earth brought forth flowers, and the cuckoos heralded the spring.<sup>108</sup>

Here we seem to have the equivalent of the lifting of a curse on the landscape, which seems to become more fertile as a result. Yet there is a striking contrast here, in terms of attitudes toward populated landscapes with ancestral associations, with the lifting of the curse on the landscape in the Welsh tale of Manawydan in *The Mabinogi*, as well as with the vernacular Anglo-Saxon term for wasteland used in the poem. In the Welsh story, which seems related to Irish notions of ensuring the fertility of the land through the king's union with the goddess of the land,<sup>109</sup> the cursed landscape seen from the sacred mound is a fertile natural landscape but devoid of people. Analogously, in derivative form, the later Arthurian romances depicted the wasteland of the Fisher King as a place in which the manmade castle or its inhabitants would vanish as the king was ailing. Use of the Old English term *wæsten* in the Guthlac accounts and elsewhere likewise doesn't necessarily signify a wasteland in the modern sense, as in some kind of arid or poisoned desert, so much as it does an area devoid of people and human

improvements. But what happens narratively in the aftermath of Guthlac's victories is not the restoration of people to the landscape, but in effect their expulsion from it, and the poet's description of the phantom beings as woe-filled refugees at the mound informs our sense of them as related to indigenous ancestral aspects of the landscape.<sup>110</sup>

In a sense, the devilish spirits of the landscape are the spirits of the native population that demographically was still present in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, though increasingly being defined as essentially distinct (when not assimilated through marriage and cultural change) by consolidated Anglo-Saxon polities such as Mercia and the centralized ecclesiastical jurisdictions entwined with them. Moreover the landscape itself was, as *Guthlac A* indicates, being cast in allegorical mode. Guthlac's real home was in heaven, not on earth. As he casts out the Welsh-speaking devils in Felix's account, he does so by reciting the opening verse of Psalm 67 (Latin and Greek numbering), which aptly deals with the triumph of God over enemies; this same psalm also contrasts the mountain of God with other wicked mountains that are compared to evil kings. A second transformation of the landscape is described near the end of *Guthlac B* at the saint's departure to the spiritual landscape of his eternal home. There is a similarity here with the ending of *Beowulf*. There the hero lifts a curse on the land by expelling the dragon from the treasure-raided barrow. Yet there too the redeemed landscape is one devoid of human fertility. The hero's eagerness for fame has left him without an heir and the kingdom undefended, its impending doom already known to the poem's readers, only the monument of the beacon-barrow left behind. Monks follow Guthlac to the site, according to later tradition, but this is not explained in the early accounts of his life examined here. If *Beowulf* is a type of the pagan hero, celebrated with a necessary circumscribed destiny by a Christian writer, Guthlac's reward lies not in worldly fame but in an eternal home.<sup>111</sup>

The image of the haunted barrow receives added significance in *Guthlac B* from the poem's discussion of the death of Guthlac using the image of the body as a house, with the corollary that death involves the unlocking of the house. Here themes of the Fall (such as the motif of Eve's drink as a poison in Creation not antidoted until the Incarnation and Eucharist) and of Guthlac as a healing warrior of God attended by birds in his fight with demons, give way to a discussion by the saint of the upcoming severance of body and soul. The focus of the battle for the haunted barrow has here become almost entirely the mortality of fallen man that is the curse of Eve's disobedience, and the saint's triumph over it through Christ by

escaping the haunted barrow that is itself the earthly barrow (and lot) of mortal man. Guthlac tells his faithful companion (presumably Beccel) here of his eagerness for his "dwelling on high" to come, how he is "girt for the journey" in which his "soul struggles forth from the body to lasting joy in bliss."<sup>112</sup> Again and again the emphasis is on his spirit passing from his body, and how this sustains him. In the end, his bodily presence is made to seem almost a phantom existence compared to the life to come. He instructs his follower to bury his "soulless frame" at the barrow mound, "where it shall bide afterwards for a space in its earthly house."<sup>113</sup> He pledges that his friendship with his follower will continue after death, and suddenly it is as if the reader glimpses an answer to the lost ancestral associations of the "native" terrestrial landscape in the intertwining of the living and the dead among the saints of the church. The landscape description is breathtakingly a landscape of death and spiritual rebirth, a rush of perspective adjusting to another world:

Pa se æpela glæm  
setlgong sohte, Swearc norðroðor  
won under wolcnum, Woruld miste oferteah  
pystrum bipeahte, þrong night ofer tilht  
londes frætwa. Ða cwom leohta mæst,  
halig of heofonum hædre scanan,  
beorhte ofer burgsalu.

...

Wuldres scima,  
æpele ymb æpelene, ondlonge niht  
scan scirwered. Scadu sweþredon,  
tolysed under lyfte. Wæs se leohta glæm  
ymb þæt halge hus, heofonlic condel,  
from æfenglome oppæt eastan cwom  
ofer deop gelad dægredwoma,  
wedertacen wearm. (lines 460-75)

Then the glorious splendor sought its setting; the black northern sky was dark under the clouds; it wrapped the world in mist; covered it with darkness; night came rushing down over the world, over the land's adornments. Then came the greatest of lights in holiness from heaven, shining clearly, radiant over the city-dwellings [or dwellings of that refuge].<sup>114</sup> ... An excellent glorious light shone bright about the noble man the livelong night; the

shadows drew off, dispersed through the air. The gleaming splendor, the heavenly candle, stayed round that sacred house from the dusk of evening till dawn; the glowing sun came from the east over the deep sea path.<sup>115</sup>

The saint, saying, "Now the soul is very ready to leave the body, longing for joys divine," partakes of the eucharist, opens his eyes and looks towards the heavenly kingdom, "towards the reward of grace; and then sent forth his spirit, beauteous by its acts, into the joy of heaven."<sup>116</sup> His departure is more heroic, reminiscent of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood*, than Augustinian in doctrine of salvation. But it is the allegorization of landscape that reflects the Gregorian development of Augustinian world-view. In the end a tower of light is described as going from Guthlac's hermitage into the heavens, brighter than the sun, as angels sing a song of triumph, "the old dwelling of the blessed one filled within with the sound of angels." The angelic song and holy odor on the island, more pleasant than any in the world, is reminiscent of some of the Irish otherworldly descriptions of blessed isles. But it is Guthlac's release from the haunted barrow of the body that has brought the transformation. His companion, afraid, rows away over the waters, lamenting in the style of other Anglo-Saxon poetic themes of water-faring wanderers, the loss of friend and home. The dirge is both a reminder of the old Germanic heroic ethic applied to a Christian context, and an implicit comparison of the empty barrow of Guthlac's island and body with the empty tomb of Christ.

Ellen biþ selast þam þe ofost sceal  
dreogan dryhtenbealu, deope behyrgan  
þroht, þeodengedal þonne seo þrag cymeð,  
wefen wyrðstafum. (lines 530-33)

Courage is best for him who most often must endure great ills, seriously ponder on grievous parting from a master, when the time comes destined by fate.<sup>117</sup>

While Guthlac's body will be buried on the island, we are told that its time there too is temporary; his new home is in heaven. The landscape and the earth have become the monument of an empty tomb, a marker of the holy man's incorporation of the landscape, and thus synecdochally the incorporation of the landscape by the spiritual authority (the church and perhaps Christian state) that he represents in the narrative.



In the varying Anglo-Saxon accounts of Guthlac's life we can see a significant orientation of Mercian landscape akin in scope to that described by Tilley in the early Neolithic, and comparable in some ways to the appearance of inscribed stones as boundary markers in western Britain in the fifth to seventh centuries.<sup>118</sup> However, this monumentalization of the landscape is textual and allegoric. The mound-monuments in *Beowulf* and the Guthlac tales mark a map of conceptual control not only over the geographical landscape of their settings (with, in the case of *Beowulf*, analogues to southeastern Britain), but also of the Otherworld of native ancestral associations with the land, including natural forces beyond the immediate cosmos of human community.

### INTO THE OTHERWORLDLY WATERS

In both *Beowulf* and the Guthlac narratives, this landscape motif of the haunted barrow is framed by otherworldly waters that express this process of monumentalizing landscape by textualizing it. Seascapes in particular frame *Beowulf*, a text whose placelessness is paradoxically rooted in ancestral history, with the dragon's barrow in faraway Geatland and the Grendelcyn lair (itself a kind of tomb for both its clan and perhaps for the older giant race whose artifacts are found there) in the midst of the watery mere.<sup>119</sup> Even the seemingly geographic waters of the sea in the poem have metaphoric connotations. "The Anglo-Saxons developed a fondness for literalizing the Augustinian metaphor of alienation," James Earl notes,<sup>120</sup> and the poem maps a literal landscape of alienation, sea-side, that echoes other Old English poetic seascapes but stands in contrast with Irish depictions of the sea as paradisiacal Otherworld (yet extension of the earth), seen in the eighth-century *Imram Brain*.

To the evolving Anglo-Saxon sense of identity, the sea was both an ethnic historical border and an allegory for the Christian sense of the fleeting nature of mortality. The two are related in the traditional Christian view of baptism as an immersion in waters signifying death followed by new life. *Beowulf* as a retrospectively Christian reconstruction of ancestral pagan heroism is thus appropriately hedged about by descriptions of the sea, as is the Norse cosmology sketched by Snorri Sturluson in thirteenth-century Iceland, but in a way also reminiscent of Bede's description of the parable of the bird flying through the mead hall as an illustration of the immense unknowns bounding human life. The double-bound metaphoric mean-

ing of the sea was appropriate to a culture that in the eighth century was constructing its origins as a pilgrim people, in a sense both spiritually and historically, in exile on British soil, with an Augustinian ideology that emphasized the fallen nature of creation and human beings.

This less-than-solid setting for a landscape of origins is extended metaphorically in descriptions of both Grendel's watery mere and Guthlac's fens. *Beowulf* starts with the mythic tale of Scyld, progenitor of a Danish dynasty to which the poem gives Anglian connections,<sup>121</sup> who appears from the sea and vanishes back into it on a burial boat. The poem ends with the mound erected on the coast as a memorial to Beowulf (a hero who narratively comes from the sea both in a youthful initiation rite and in his arrival to rescue the Danes), a monument to guide seafarers and remind them of his fame.

The sea or the wilds surrounding mere and fenland all divide the reader from the place of the action while implicitly echoing both the religious distance to the spiritual homeland of Christians in the Augustinian tradition especially and the motif of exile/immigrant origin myth as formed fully by Bede for pagan Anglo-Saxon culture. This process parallels thematically the metrical effect of the caesura-break in Old English poetic lines, which Fred Robinson described as stylistically representing the thematic apposition (and separation) of ancestral pagan past and Christian present in *Beowulf*. Of the sea-enclosed end (and beginning) of Scyld, the *Beowulf* poet wrote,

Nalæs hi hine læssan lacum teodan,  
 peod-gestreonum, þon þa dydon,  
 þe hine æt frumscafte forð onsendon  
 ænne ofer yðe umbor-wesende.  
 þa gyt hi him asetton segend gyldenre  
 heah ofer heafod, leton holm beran,  
 geafon on gar-secg; him was geomor sefa,  
 murnende mod. Men ne cunnon  
 secgan to soðe, sele-rædende,  
 hæleð under heofenum, hwa þæm hlæste onfeng. (lines 43–52)

They decked his body no less bountifully  
 with offerings than those first ones did  
 who cast him away when he was a child  
 and launched him alone out over the waves.  
 And they set a gold standard up



high above his head and let him drift  
to wind and tide, bewailing him  
and mourning their loss. No man can tell,  
no wise man in hall or weathered veteran  
knows for certain who salvaged that load.<sup>122</sup>

Beowulf's memorial is described in similar terms:

Geworhton ða Wedra leode  
hleō on hoe, se was heah ond brad,  
weg-liðendum wide gesyne,  
ond betimbredon on tyn dagum  
beadu-rofes becn; bronda lafe  
wealle beworhton, swa hyt weorðlicost  
fore-snotre men findan mihton. (lines 3156–62)

Then the Geat people began to construct  
a mound on a headland, high and imposing,  
a marker that sailors could see from far away,  
and in ten days they had done the work.  
It was their hero's memorial; what remained from the fire  
they housed inside it, behind a wall  
as worthy of him as their workmanship could make it.<sup>123</sup>

In this seascape frame of *Beowulf* we see an embodiment of both the Anglo-Saxon literary motif of exile and the aforementioned Augustinian metaphor of alienation, in a hero who fights monsters in a foreign land and returns home but never founds a family or a dynasty of his own. His rule is ended by a supernatural monster whom he chooses to fight alone, while his heroic death is cast as leading inevitably to the destruction of his kingdom, even as the hero is eulogized over a pyre and in a memorial mound along the sea. The poem itself, framed by Scyld's appearance from the sea and Beowulf's seaside beacon-barrow, reflects the immensities framing earthly exile between birth and death. As Earl writes, the roots of the "image of the exile in the prison-house" displayed in Old English poems such as *The Seafarer* and *Christ I* (but also arguably in Beowulf's mere and barrow fights, and indeed his whole earthly career), using sea-related imagery, lie in Augustinian theology. While calling such religious influence "distant and subliminal," Earl notes that it shapes the exile theme nonetheless, which

"flourishes in these poems independently, because it is the profoundest philosophical expression of the traditional Anglo-Saxon view of the world that is at least compatible with Christianity, if uneasily."<sup>124</sup>

The analogue between this aspect of *Beowulf* and Bede's account of the pagan Northumbrian high-priest Coifi's parable of a sparrow flying through a hall as representing human life is also apparent. The sea-framed exile theme "is something of a compromise, really, between the Adamic myth and the parable of the sparrow-flight, stressing the wretchedness of man's condition more than his sinfulness."<sup>125</sup> In these literary seascapes, the image of the war band member in exile becomes merged with that of the voyage of the Christian depicted in the metaphor of the ship at the end of *Christ II* and Bede's construction of the pilgrim Anglo-Saxon people. This highlights the relation of the poem's landscape to concerns of political power, what Alcuin in his conception of allegory considered a necessary grounding of story in history.<sup>126</sup> Stylistically, the meeting of Christian ideology and Germanic poetic tradition helps to explain the conjunction of "transcendent" and "immanent" imagery that Earl saw as a hallmark of Old English poetry, the stylistic "clarity" of thematically obscure poetry as described by Sara Higley in contrast with early Welsh verse.<sup>127</sup> Herein lies a seeming paradox of Old English narrative, that often it is both realistic and allegorical.<sup>128</sup> Thus, for example, the description of Beowulf's encounter with the sea in his competition with Breca is naturalistic—at least relative to other Insular narrative traditions<sup>129</sup>—while expressing the harsh allegorized sense of the sea disjunctive to Old English poetry:

Ða wit ætsonne on sæ wæron  
fif nihta fyrst, oppæt unc flod todraf,  
wado weallende, wedera cealdost,  
nipende niht, ond norþan-wind  
heaðo-grim ondhwearf. Hreo wæron ypa,  
wæs mere-fixa mod onhræd.  
...  
Ac on mergenne mecum wunde  
be yð-lafe uppe lægon,  
sweordum aswefede, þæt syðþan na  
ymb brontne forð brim-liðende  
lade ne letton. Leoht eastan com,  
beorht beacen Godes; brimu swaþredon  
þæt ic sæ-næssas geseon mihte,

windige weallas. Wyrð oft nered  
unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deah. (lines 544-49; 565-73)

Shoulder to shoulder, we struggled on  
for five nights, until the long flow  
and pitch of the waves, the perishing cold,  
night falling and winds from the north  
drove us apart. The deep boiled up  
and its wallowing sent the sea-brutes wild.

...  
Instead, in the mornings, mangled and sleeping  
the sleep of the sword, they slopped and floated  
like the ocean's leavings. From now on  
sailors would be safe, the deep-sea raids  
were over for good. Light came from the east,  
bright guarantee of God, and the waves  
went quiet; I could see headlands  
and buffeted cliffs. Often, for undaunted courage,  
fate spares the man it has not already marked.<sup>130</sup>

The light that is both the sunlight and also signifies the divine presence, at the conclusion of Beowulf's struggle with the sea monsters, is reminiscent of the light in his later mere struggle. Likewise, the threatening nature of the waters here is amplified in the description of the mere at a later, more climactic point in the poem. Here too we see represented a major theme of the poem, that is, the role of the hero in making safe the landscape (in this case seascape) for human use:

þæt syðþan na  
ymb brontne ford brim-lilpende  
lade ne letton. (lines 567b-69a)

... so that henceforth they [sea monsters] would never hinder sea-goers in  
their passage over the deep ocean-crossing.<sup>131</sup>

By comparison, accounts of the sea and watery encounters with sea monsters in Irish writings (the sea tends not to figure largely in the apparently landlocked literary imagination of the Welsh) tend not to be so charged with evil associations and moral concerns related to the fate of human society.<sup>132</sup>

The play of cultural concerns upon the settings of Old English poetry yields seascapes that are expressions of subjectivity,<sup>133</sup> projections of internal mental conditions, while also seeming extraordinarily real to the reader (as in *The Seafarer* or in Beowulf's match with Breca or his struggle in the mere). However, as noted, they also are more distanced from associations with specific Insular physical places than Irish and Welsh landscape narratives. While we often know where on the actual landscape of Ireland and Wales the stories are unfolding, Beowulf is in a far country and even Guthlac's mound is hidden among the fens. This does not mean, however, that these works themselves were distant from the concerns of their audiences. Not fully allegories, they are however allegorized, with their center not in a larger sense of nature or Creation but in human moral concerns. They reflect both the separation between spiritual and earthly realms evident in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* and Gregory I's influential derivative view of nature as an allegorized mediating space, as seen in his *Moralia in Job*.

In this context, it is no coincidence that Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother in the mere, the most prominent landscape of the work, lies structurally at the center of the triptych of the warrior's heroic monster battles. The detailed and gloomy description of the mere is a geographical interiorizing of the Anglo-Saxon seascape of exile, representing its transfer to the interior of the countryside (putatively Scandinavian but metaphorically Anglo-Saxon).<sup>134</sup> It advances Mercian hegemony over that interior by supporting the Anglo-Saxon identity myth of supra-landscape authority, vested in both Bede's history and in Augustinian Christianity. It also functions as a backdrop for a type of exorcism of pagan ancestral associations from earlier cultural landscapes<sup>135</sup> (analogous with Beowulf's earlier removal of the sea monsters from the sea lanes during his competition with Breca), in which Grendel and his mother function as stand-ins for residual "native" Celtic populations in areas such as the fenlands, while also displaying analogues with descriptions of Christ's descent into hell and apocryphal visions of the Christian Hades.

Nis þæt feor heonen  
mil-gemearcas, þæt se mere standeð  
ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas;  
wudu wyrtrum fæst wæter oferhelmað.  
þær mæg nihta gehwæm nið-wundor seon,  
fyr on flode; no þæs frod leofað

gumena bearna þæt þone grund wite.  
 Ðeah þe hæð-stapa hundum geswenced,  
 heorot homum trum holt-wudu sece,  
 feorran geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,  
 aldor on ofre, ær he in wille,  
 hafelan hydan. Nis þæt heoru stow;  
 þonon yð-geblond up astiged  
 won to wolcnum, þonne wind styrep  
 lað gewidru, oðbaet lyft ðrysmap,  
 roderas reotað. (lines 1361b-82)

A few miles from here  
 a frost-stiffened wood waits and keeps watch  
 above a mere; the overhanging bank  
 is a maze of tree-roots mirrored in its surface.  
 At night there, something uncanny happens:  
 the water burns. And the mere bottom  
 has never been sounded by the sons of men.  
 On its bank, the heather-stepper halts:  
 the hart in flight from pursuing hounds  
 will turn to face them with firm-set horns  
 and die in the wood rather than dive  
 beneath its surface. That is no good place.  
 When wind blows up and stormy weather  
 makes clouds scud and the skies weep,  
 out of its depths a dirty surge  
 is pitched towards the heavens.<sup>136</sup>

Ofereode þa æþelinga bearn  
 steap stan-hliðo, stige nearwe,  
 enge an-paðas, uncuð gelad,  
 neowle næssas, nicor-husa fela.  
 He feara sum beforan gengde  
 wisr monna, wong sceawian;  
 oðbæt he færinga fyrge-beamas  
 ofer harne stan hleonian funde,  
 wyn-leasne wudu; wæter under stod  
 dreorig on gedrefed. Denum eallum wæs,  
 winum Scyldinga, weorce on mode

to gepolianne, ðegne monegum,  
 oncyð eorla gehwæm, syðþan Æscheres  
 on þam holm-clife hafelan metton.

Flod blode weol—folc to sægon—  
 hatan heolfre. Horn stundum song  
 fuslic fyrd-leoð. Feþa eal gesæt;  
 gesawon ða æfter wætere wyrm-cynnes fela,  
 sellice sæ-dracan sund cunnian,  
 swylce on næs-hleoðum nicras licgean,  
 ða on undern-mæl oft bewitigað  
 sorh-fulne sið on segl-rade,  
 wyrmas ond wil-deor. (lines 1408-30)

So the noble prince proceeded undismayed  
 up fells and screes, along narrow footpaths  
 and ways where they were forced into single file,  
 ledges on cliffs above lairs of water-monsters.  
 He went in front with a few men,  
 good judges of the lie of the land,  
 and suddenly discovered the dismal wood,  
 mountain trees growing out at an angle  
 above grey stones: the bloodshot water  
 surged underneath. It was a sore blow  
 to all of the Danes, friends of the Shieldings,  
 a hurt to each and every one  
 of that noble company when they came upon  
 Aeschere's head at the foot of the cliff.

Everybody gazed as the hot gore  
 kept wallowing up and an urgent war-horn  
 repeated its notes: the whole party  
 sat down to watch. The water was infested  
 with all kinds of reptiles. There were writhing sea-dragons  
 and monsters slouching on slopes by the cliff,  
 serpents and wild things such as those that often  
 surface at dawn to roam the sail-road  
 and doom the voyage.<sup>137</sup>

This forbidding watery landscape has, in broad terms, analogues in the Old Icelandic *Grettissaga*<sup>138</sup> and especially in explicitly Christian writings such as



the Old English Blickling Homily and Irish texts of the *Visio S. Pauli*.<sup>139</sup> The existence of such explicit analogues to descriptions of the Christian hell, in such a detailed description of the backdrop to an heroic act in pagan times, testifies again to the distinctive character of Old English literary landscape, as allegorized in a fairly objectified style of description. In addition, Frank Battaglia and Richard North have separately analyzed the use of *geofon* ("sea" or "ocean" in Klaeber), a term derived from a Germanic goddess name, in descriptions of watery depths in *Beowulf* and other Old English poetry, as lending remote pagan or demonic associations to the sea for a Christian audience.<sup>140</sup> Hellish aspects of the description of the mere set the hero Beowulf in a role of harrowing hell as a Christ figure, while at the same time forming part of a story about a hero defeating a monstrous demon in a pagan setting. The description elsewhere in the poem of Grendel and his mother as descendants of Cain also place these monsters not only in a biblical context but identify them (unlike Celtic analogues) as human or quasi-human beings with an ancient pedigree in the land.<sup>141</sup> Beowulf's extinction of the Grendelcyn climaxes in his struggle with Grendel's mother, in which the hero finds the mere illumined by divine light as he slays her. The waters boil and their surface seethes with her blood as he shoots back up to the top of the mere. Beowulf, a warrior from across the sea, has slain the quasi-human creatures most identified with the landscape, thus purging the wasteland of evil. This echoes Guthlac's own exorcism of the Welsh-speaking spirits infesting his barrow in the fens in Felix's eighth-century Latin life of the saint.

But again the sense of what defines a wasteland appears to be very different in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon narratives. In both *Beowulf* and the Guthlac tales, a purification of wastelands is marked by an exorcism of quasi-human land spirits, and ultimately by a kind of monolithic (and in twentieth-century terms existential) loneliness of the hero before God that marks cleansing and restoration of the landscape. In Beowulf's final purging of the dragon from his kingdom, the end result is the destruction of his kingdom, leaving only his memorial mound and praise of his heroism. While Guthlac's legacy at Crowland is implicit in his *Lives*, the early English accounts do not describe the creation of a monastic "city" as his legacy. Here the influence of St. Augustine of Hippo's theory of two invisible cities of human history, the "city of God" and "city of man," forged in the fall of the Western empire, is again apparent in the Anglo-Saxon distancing of text from experience of a living landscape.

In Old English literary culture, the sea and its derivatives reflect both a re-imagined Germanic ancestral past and the unredeemed human condi-

tion, an insubstantial wasteland that in turn provides the model for nature more generally in Old English poetry.<sup>142</sup> The plots of both *Beowulf* and the *Lives* of Guthlac contrast earthly wastelands with potential spiritual reward. The same contrast implicitly defines older, more indigenously constructed British-Celtic polities as unredeemed, while supporting the land claims of the new more centralized and ecclesiastically allied Anglo-Saxon realms. In Augustinian terms, "True justice can exist only among the citizens of the City of God,"<sup>143</sup> which becomes identified with imperial claims of Western kingship in the Carolingian era. In Beowulf's victorious plunge into the interior sea of the mere can be seen a paradigm legitimizing Mercian hegemony over the English landscape.

The relationship between this literary making of landscape and emerging medieval notions of both monarchy and individuality is suggested by the literary theorist Julia Kristeva's analysis of the role of Augustinian theology in constructing the relation between notions of identity and nature in the West. In this process the Augustinian "dual procession" definition of the Trinity, ascendant in the Anglo-Saxon church as on the Continent in the early Middle Ages,<sup>144</sup> is a key marker. In the West, greater focus on the role of the Son in the Trinity, and lessened emphasis on the Holy Spirit

had the advantage of providing a basis for the political and spiritual authority of the papacy on the one hand, and on the other for the autonomy and rationality of the believer's person, identified with a Son having power and prestige equal to that of the Father. What had thus been gained in equality and therefore in performance and historicity had perhaps been lost at the level of the experience of *identification*, in the sense of a permanent instability of identity. Difference and identity, rather than autonomy and equality, did on the contrary build up the Eastern Trinity, which consequently became the source of ecstasy and mysticism.<sup>145</sup>

Beowulf's emergence from the mere can be understood in this theological perspective and in Kristeva's terms as the establishment of the autonomy of the individual hero (and of his warrior/proto-Christian culture) with respect to the natural landscape, the Subject in relation to the Other. Politically this is paralleled in an emergence of an ideology of individualized, proprietary and patrimonial but national monarchy in the Anglo-Saxon and Frankish realms.<sup>146</sup>

The problem of the lack of stable identification that Kristeva sees in Western definitions of individuality relates to the West's arguably more

objectified and oppositional social relations with both nature and ancestry. A literate sense of individual autonomy in Western culture in the early Middle Ages can thus be contextualized as emerging at the intersection of Augustinian Christianity with concerns about forging national identities from populations lacking clear demographic ethnicity. Intensifying this process for the Anglo-Saxons is the defining of native British or Welsh ethnicities, and by extension the native landscape of Britain, as a kind of subhuman Other that is pre-symbolic.<sup>147</sup> In this context the description of the mere can be viewed as the construction of a pre-symbolic place, into which the hero injects the symbolic and himself emerges as a symbol. The differentiation of the Western individual has become a performative act in opposition to nature, as has the formation of nationhood, reflecting the Gregorian notion that nature is a virtual code, devoid of real meaning until read (and hence also written), in which process subjectivity is performed for both individuals and nations.

In a Kristevan landscape analysis, the bloody grime of the mere of Grendel's mother, like menstrual blood, is thus both a reminder of difference and a threat to the social aggregate of patriarchal symbolic order.<sup>148</sup> With the arrival of Beowulf, the entrance of linear temporality "renders explicit a rupture, an expectation, or an anguish which other temporalities work to conceal."<sup>149</sup> Augustine likewise wrote of linear time as related to the grammar of the sentence.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, the runic giant sword taken up by Beowulf in the mere is a literate monumental object, reordering the previously chaotic, non-objectified maternal landscape (and destroying its monstrous inhabitants). In a sense, the hall of the Danes could not exist without the maternal mere defining it from outside by its role as the abject, what Kristeva calls in another context "the horror that they seize on in order to build themselves up and function,"<sup>151</sup> just as the construction of English identity in the seventh and eighth centuries required a defining of the Welsh and other non-English cultures as Other.

Yet Heorot is constructed as an island of civilization (and, analogous to the hall in Bede's sparrow story and Valhalla in paean tradition, a microcosm of Creation as well) even more confined and hemmed in by the powers of chaos than the kingdom of Ulster in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, where human society, the landscape, the route of the attack and defense, and the running of the magical bulls, are all less singly focused, and the struggle is ultimately human. If Beowulf ("the bear") shares with the Ulster hero Cúchulainn ("the dog of Culann") an animal name, the Anglo-Saxon hero is throughout his narrative both more distanced from nature and in a sense

more isolated from the divine. While both tales have been read as recounting a breaking of the power of a goddess figure, in the Irish cycle there is a sense of both nature and mythic history continuing to run their interlaced course after the narrative's denouement.<sup>152</sup> This is framed in one of the Irish manuscripts by an ongoing argument of colophons in Irish and in Latin over whether this is appropriate literature to be reading (yes says the Irish, no says the Latin). Ulster is saved, and lives on to have more than allegorical meaning for emerging contemporary dynastic concerns. At the end of *Beowulf*, by contrast, we are left in effect with a cenotaph (as in the Guthlacian *Lives*).<sup>153</sup> Integral to the secular poem's conclusion is the foreshadowing of the end of the kingdom. The mourning for the uncertain end of a human hero in a fallen world is a prototype of Anglo-Saxon exile heroes like St. Guthlac, who in a newly constructed land could only hope for entry into the city of God while bringing true Christian rule to benighted British earth. And that is the great theme of Bede's near-contemporary history and its framework cultural landscape: the textually totalizing (and necessarily imperfect) effort to resolve the tension between religious and secular concerns regarding nation-building.

In the Augustinian interpretation of signs and its Gregorian derivative can be found the framework for Anglo-Saxon literary landscape as both more subjectified in the sense of its moral focus and more objectified in its stylistic construction.<sup>154</sup> When the grace of the Holy Spirit is emphasized doctrinally more as an objectified and discrete insertion into creation (as arguably was the case in the Augustinian West, contrasted with the Greek emphases on divine energies in nature), the divine becomes more distanced from the natural, and the natural from the human as God's image. Nature becomes more symbolic than real. Such a monumentalizing of landscape as written text, rather than merely marking a specific physical place with a physical monument as in the prehistoric or earliest Christian landscapes of Britain, is integrally related in the Anglo-Saxon texts examined here to narratives of taking possession of a wilderness land. This is achieved through textually distancing the reader from the physical environment by symbolizing a vista naturalistically, while ironically tending to render the environment in the text lifeless. Here can be seen the apparent paradox that Augustinian emphases on the corruption of nature supported the construction of a new cultural landscape promoting political hegemony, which developed into ultimately more allegoric yet naturalistic Western literary and artistic views of landscape, all the way from the narrative frame of Dante's high medieval cosmic fantasy to virtual realities of our day. The Anglo-



Saxon literary landscape differentiated itself from the iconographic sense of integration with the physical world found in pre-Augustinian notions of synergetic salvation, which helped shape narratives of neighboring Irish and Welsh literary traditions. And in a trend begun in that formative era of early medieval narratives of nation-building, landscape became in the West both a palimpsest for human moral and political concerns, and a cenotaph in its lack of real engagement with larger forces of nature.

## NOTES

- 1 J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf": *The Monsters and the Critics* (1936; reprint London, 1958), p. 24.
- 2 Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, Eng., 1999), p. 37.
- 3 Margaret Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of "Beowulf"* (London, 1970), p. 44.
- 4 Such doubts and suspicions stem both from reinterpretation of archaeological evidence in a way that now suggests that "Germanic" migration to post-Roman Britain was very limited in number and also greater awareness of the politics behind ethnic-defining scholarship: see respectively Michael Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1996), and Patrick Sims-Williams, "The Visionary Celt: The Construction of an Ethnic Preconception," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 2 (1986): 71-96.

5 Ecocriticism is a type of literary criticism related to postcolonial theory that seeks to center readings on attitudes toward the natural land in literary texts, in order to analyze implicit cultural attitudes toward nature and related issues of ethnicity and power that might otherwise lie unexamined. The coining of the term is credited to William Rueckert, whose seminal article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" is reprinted in a basic anthology of ecocritical writings entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, Georgia, 1996), pp. 105-23. Cheryll Glotfelty is a founding figure in the movement and of its central journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. Lawrence Buell's book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995) is a seminal extended scholarly work in the field. In the view of Buell, one of the goals of such criticism should be "to take stock of the resources within our traditions of thought that might help address" modern biases about nature, and thus achieve a more "ecocentric" view of human communities in relation to the environment in the 21st century, based on better understanding of past traditions (p. 21). For

fairly recent approaches to issues of landscape focusing mainly on later periods of English and Western European literature, see also *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. John Parham (Aldershot and Burlington, Eng., 2002); Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, Eng., 1993); and Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape* (London, 1971). Nicholas Howe has discussed the constructed yet layered nature of early English literary landscapes (and their sense of pilgrim-exile) in his valuable essay "The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England: Inherited, Invented, Imagined" in *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe*, ed. John Howe and Michael Wolfe (Tallahassee, 2002). For recent studies of physical aspects of Anglo-Saxon landscape, see Delia Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1998), and Oliver Rackham's works on early English woodlands.

6 Earlier modern scholarship tended to assume some kind of ethnic predisposition or pagan influence involved in "more severe" Anglo-Saxon treatments of nature, rather than approaching more rigorously how cultural values in a formative period of a culture can set patterns of perception, as discussed in anthropological terms by Clifford Geertz among others. See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973). The importance of formative ideological emphases is exemplified on a large physical scale by the influence of 18th-century Jeffersonian Enlightenment cosmology on the national landscape of the United States. Much of the American Middle West's topography is now meshed by a right-angled grid of settlement and fanning as a result of Cartesian views of nature encoded in the Northwest Ordinance.

7 As discussed later, I accept the 20th-century scholarly consensus, recently backed by Michael Lapidge's paleogeographical analysis, that *Beowulf* most likely has an eighth-century provenance, although the issue remains contentious; see Michael Lapidge, "The Archetype of *Beowulf*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2000): 5-41. My arguments relating issues of ethnic and national identity with landscape in the poem could still apply to a date for the poem in the later Danelaw era, however, in a changed context.

8 "Augustinian" and "Augustinianism," like "Celtic," are broad but needed shorthand terms in relation to the intellectual pedigree of Anglo-Saxon Christianity as traced back through its spiritual father Pope Gregory I, who organized the mission that Bede in his early 8th-century history cast as foundational for Anglo-Saxon identity. The key elements of Augustine of Hippo's influence relating to the subject of this study are his emphases on salvation by grace and not works; on individual transmission of Original Sin; on the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son and the Father together (a doctrine that became the *filioque* addition to the Nicæan-Constantinopolitan Creed); and on signs as having a



reality apart from that which they symbolize. The combination of these four related emphases is what is meant here by Augustinian. As amplified by Gregory the Great and others, Augustine's writings on these topics greatly influenced literary views of Creation, and thus the portrayal of landscape. Such ideas of course influenced Irish literary culture as well, but because the Romano-British, Pictish, and Irish realms were not convened through Gregory's mission, and did not identify their Christian culture with papal influence to the same extent as the Anglo-Saxons, this influence was not so pronounced. Gregory was revered in both Irish and Greek literary worlds as a holy man and father of the church (to the extent that, in the former, he was claimed to have had an Irish mother!), especially for his *Dialogues*. But in Anglo-Saxon England Gregory's literary role was ancestral in import, and part of a narrowing of the range of patristic influences in the developing Western church. "One of the chief links between Augustine and the Middle Ages," Gregory "owes more to Augustine than to any other individual writer," notes Carole Straw ("Gregory I," in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald [Grand Rapids, 1999], pp. 402, 404).

<sup>9</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 2002), pp. 5–34.

<sup>10</sup> Many commentators, most recently Michael Herren and Shirley Anne Brown in *Christ in Celtic Christianity* (Woodbridge, Eng., 2002), have sought to define a Pelagian strain in early Irish and Welsh Christianity, although Cassianite better suggests its relative orthodoxy. Irish ascetic and penitential emphasis on a synergy of grace and works was shaped in a "pre-Augustinian" Christian milieu in the British Isles, long prior to Pope Gregory's papal mission to the Anglo-Saxon realms in 597, on the model of the desert fathers, and probably influenced by connections with the Eastern Mediterranean. John Cassian's portrayal in his thirteenth conference of a desert father's implicit criticism of Augustine's emphases on grace and Original Sin was, if not a source for early Celtic literary culture, a parallel expression of prevalent ascetic emphasis. An early Irish elegy to St. Columba suggests the importance of Cassian's writings to that seminal figure in the Irish church; likewise echoes of Cassian's thought are found in the seminal Celtic penitential attributed to Uinniau; see Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, pp. 117, 124. While Stephen Mercer Lake in "The Influence of John Cassian on Early Continental and Insular Monasticism to ca. A.D. 817" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1996) is skeptical of Cassian's direct influence on Western monasticism, he notes apparent affinities of Irish monasticism with the Egyptian monasticism that Cassian promoted (p. 218). Such affinities lie in part behind Michael Richter's statement that the Irish tendency to honor the concept of the "naturally good" and pagan ancestral tradition in a non-Augustinian way

was probably well-established "considerably earlier" than the seventh century: "If the Irish Christian teachers had had a choice between Augustine and others, they chose the others" (*Ireland and her Neighbors in the Seventh Century* [New York, 1999], p. 37). This in turn relates to the wide range of patristic sources for early Irish literary culture, apparently more extensive than that evidenced in the Anglo-Saxon corpus, and compared to a bibliographic "hall closet" distinctive in the early medieval West; see Peter Jeffery, "Eastern and Western Elements in the Irish Monastic Prayer of the Hours" in *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages*, ed. Margot E. Fassler and Rebecca A. Baltzer (Oxford, 2000), p. 100. See also Thomas N. Hall, "Apocryphal Lore and the Life of Christ in Old English Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana, 1990), and Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, Eng., 1996). A parallel example of inculturation of non-Augustinian Christianity with a developing sense of "native" identity is seen in the encounter of Russian missionaries with Aleuts in Alaska as described by Michael Oleska, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality* (New York, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Landscape as a modern term has no commonly used precise equivalent in early Insular literatures—Irish, Welsh, Old English, and associated Latin works. "Creation" instead was the corresponding cultural concept, interwoven with definitions of physical environment. The Anglo-Saxons had terms in their native vocabulary for nature in the sense of character (*cynð*) or creation (*gesceaf*), but not for "the natural world" in the modern Western sense: (see Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, pp. 1–2). The often-used Latin words *natura* and *physica* (the latter especially rooted in Greek philosophy) carried metaphorical aspects as well. Indeed, conceptions of the physical world had overt ontological meaning in such pre-industrial societies, as the anthropologist and archaeologist Christopher Tilley points out in his definition of traditional cultural constructions of human environments in *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments* (Oxford, 1994), p. 26: "A landscape has ontological import because it is lived in and through, mediated, worked on and altered, replete with cultural meaning and symbolism—and not just something looked at or thought about, an object merely for contemplation, depiction, representation and aestheticization."

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford, 1898), p. 619.

<sup>13</sup> *Genesis B*, ed. A. N. Doane (Madison, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> For a helpful essentially postcolonial take on Bede's writing, and its relation to Gildas's and other early insular histories, see Nicholas Higham's *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London, 2002).

- <sup>15</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), p. xxx. All subsequent references to Bede are to this edition, either by page number or by Bede's book and chapter numbers.
- <sup>16</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 15.
- <sup>17</sup> For discussion of the concept of monumentality in cultural ideology and artifacts, see Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Palo Alto, 1995), p. 4 and throughout. Here the terms "monumental" and "monumentalizing" with respect to landscapes are used to express the fixed imposition of a static cultural map or matrix for a realm, involving ideological purposes of control related to issues of defining ancestry and legitimizing authority.
- <sup>18</sup> Patrick Wormald has detailed *Beowulf's* probable monastic context in his essay "Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy" in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Robert T. Farrell (Oxford, 1978), pp. 32–95.
- <sup>19</sup> Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, pp. 27, 67.
- <sup>20</sup> Gildas, a British Celtic monk who according to tradition ended up in Brittany, in his *De Excidio Britanniae* provided a sketchily near-apocalyptic account of the invasion of the Anglo-Saxons in the context of a jeremiad directed against the immorality of native British kings.
- <sup>21</sup> See, for example, Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*; Nicholas Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1992); K. P. Dark, *From Civitas to Kingdom* (Leicester, 1994); and C. J. Arnold, *An Archaeology of the Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London, 1988).
- <sup>22</sup> Veronica Ortenberg, "The Anglo-Saxon Church and the Papacy," in *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. H. Lawrence (1965; reprint Phoenix Mill, 1999), p. 34.
- <sup>23</sup> John J. Contreni, "Early Carolingian Era," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, p. 126.
- <sup>24</sup> The connection between the Augustinian intellectual pedigree of the papal mission, and the derivative ecclesiastical system of the Anglo-Saxon realms, is symbolized by the direct influence of Augustine of Hippo's writing on the works of their chronicler, Bede, and by the significant and influential presence of Augustinian books both in his library and in that of his mentor Benedict Biscop; see M. L. W. Laistner and H. H. King, *A Hand-List of Bede Manuscripts* (New York, 1943), and Joseph Kelly, "Late Carolingian Era," p. 132 and George H. Brown, "Venerable Bede," pp. 124–29, both in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*. Even more pervasive however was the influence of a broader Augustinian perspective on landscape in the "deep structure" of the new Anglo-Saxon culture celebrated by Bede.

- <sup>25</sup> Carole M. Cusack, *The Rise of Christianity in Northern Europe, 300–1000* (London, 1999), p. 81.
- <sup>26</sup> John Koch, *The Gododdin of Aneirin* (Cardiff, 1997), p. xliii.
- <sup>27</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate*, ed. John Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, 1991), 2.31.
- <sup>28</sup> The developing articulation of theophany in Eastern Christianity, as for example in St. Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*, ed. and trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York, 1978), saw revelatory signs as the direct presence of divine energy in Creation.
- <sup>29</sup> Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), pp. 75–76, 236. Not coincidentally, it was resistance to a standardized literary systematization of time, in terms of a new way of computing the date of Easter, that Bede presented as the primary example of early Irish and Welsh heterodoxy or even heresy.
- <sup>30</sup> See Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, pp. 28–29.
- <sup>31</sup> This relates to the crucial distinction of *uti* and *frui* in Augustine's thought, starting early in his career with the first book of *De Doctrina Christiana*, and developed throughout later works. His distinction between enjoyment and use relates to his strong distinction between the eternal and temporal: "Only eternal, unchangeable realities are to be enjoyed, while the rest are to be used" (Raymond Canning, "Uti/frui," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, p. 859). See *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1997), 1.22.20.
- <sup>32</sup> David Dumville, "Essex, Middle Anglia and the Expansion of Mercia in the South-East Midlands," *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Steven Bassett (London, 1989), p. 140.
- <sup>33</sup> Nicholas Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, Eng., 1995), p. 148.
- <sup>34</sup> Wormald, "Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy."
- <sup>35</sup> Against Kevin Kieman and others who postulate a late date for the poem in the 10th or 11th centuries, both the consensus of early 20th-century *Beowulf* scholarship and later re-examinations of the issue (see Wormald, "Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy" and Sam Newton, *The Origins of "Beowulf" and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* [Cambridge, Eng., 1993]) point to an eighth-century date as likeliest. The sparse evidence for the original dialect of the poem suggests an Anglian provenance in the Midlands: see Robert Bjork and Anita Obermeier, "Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences," in *A "Beowulf" Handbook*, ed. Robert Bjork and John D. Niles (Lincoln, Neb., 1997), p. 26. This evidence is reinforced by the central presence in the text of the name of the ancestral Anglian king Offa and analogues between that reference and alleged marital sufferings of the 8th-century Mercian king



Offa: see "Beowulf" and its Analogues, trans. G. N. Garmonsway and Jacqueline Simpson (London, 1968), pp. 236–37. Also significant, given the probable role of a religious center as the site of the composition, is the "close connection between the Mercian dynasty, whose ancestors appear in *Beowulf*, and which . . . produced successive kings named Beornwulf and Wiglaf in the early ninth century, and many of the most important religious foundations of the time" (Wormald, p. 54). In addition, there are the poem's analogues with the *Lives* of St. Guthlac and their 8th-century Anglian provenance, apparently under Mercian overlordship. For a recent paleogeographical argument also supporting an 8th-century date for the poem, see Lapidge, "The Archetype of *Beowulf*".

<sup>36</sup> Newton, *The Origins of "Beowulf" and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia*, pp. 142–43.

<sup>37</sup> Quotations from the Old English poetic versions of Guthlac's *Life* that follow are from Bernard Muir, ed., *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* (Exeter, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> See Koch, *The Gododdin of Aneirin*, p. xliii.

<sup>39</sup> *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, Eng., 1956). Subsequent quotations from Felix's text are from this edition.

<sup>40</sup> By contrast, the undated but later Old English prose version of Felix's *Vita* contains only a positive tribute to Irish spiritual devotion, reminiscent of the way in which the ninth-century Alfredian Old English translation of Bede's history likewise tones down negative references to the Irish, long after either peculiar Irish ways or Welsh arms were seen as real threats to Anglo-Saxon sovereignty.

<sup>41</sup> Bede's history, for example, runs counter to a Welsh tradition of more of a Celtic role in the initial conversion of Northumbria. While the latter tradition is extant in the much later Cambro-Latin *Historia Brittonum*, Nora Chadwick in her article "The Conversion of Northumbria: A Comparison of Sources" (in *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*, ed. Nora Chadwick [Cambridge, Eng., 1963], pp. 138–66) has collected circumstantial evidence for a larger role for the British and Irish churches in the Anglo-Saxon conversion than Bede allowed. Clare Stancliffe has presented an updated study of this issue with similar conclusions in "The British Church and the Mission of Augustine," in *St. Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. Richard Gameson (Phoenix Mill, 1999), pp. 107–51.

<sup>42</sup> John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx* (1901; reprint New York, 1980), pp. 676–77.

<sup>43</sup> Arthur Gray, "On the Late Survival of a Celtic Population in East Anglia," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 15, n.s. 9 (1910–11): 45.

<sup>44</sup> Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* (Cambridge, Eng., 1990), p. 26. Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 675–77, in a now-dated theory that nonetheless is supported by some aspects of recent archaeological interpretation, also suggested that inhabitants of the Fens of Middle and East Anglia might have preserved communities intact from waves of invasions going back to those by the supposed Belgic Celtic overlords of the late Iron Age. Folkloric evidence for continued British presence in the Fens was catalogued idiosyncratically by Arthur Gray early in the 20th century (see footnote 43 above). Based on revisionist views of post-Roman British history, however, it would be more likely that Britons in the area would not have constituted tribal remnants hiding in the Fens so much as the majority population whose politics would have been seized or acquired through marriage and alliance by Anglo-Saxon warriors. Not mentioned by Gray and Rhys, but fitting the hypothesis of a recrudescing Celtic population in the region of the Middle Anglians, is terminology in the Old English *Guthlac A* poem that, while standard for demons in Old English literature, also conjures up apposite associations of refugee exile for the barrow spirits hidden in the fens (e.g. *wræcsetla*, line 296; *werga gæst*, line 451; and *wræcsiða*, line 509). The second term can refer to either "spirit" or "stranger/guest," depending on the vowel length.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Eagles, "Lindsey," in Bassett, *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, p. 206.

<sup>46</sup> See Higham, *An English Empire*, p. 148.

<sup>47</sup> See also Dark, *From Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 86–88, and Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons*, p. 149.

<sup>48</sup> Theodore, sent as new archbishop of Canterbury on what was in effect the second papal mission to England in 668 by Pope Vitalian, brought with him in his company not only a returning Biscop augmenting his Augustinian library but also Hadrian of North Africa, who had been the pope's first choice for the job. Bede reports that Theodore, who was from Tarsus and a native Greek speaker, was assigned Hadrian as a companion by the pope "to take great care to prevent Theodore from introducing into the church over which he presided any Greek customs which might be contrary to the true faith" (*Ecclesiastical History*, p. 171). While this charge is thought specifically to relate to the pope's concern about monothelism in the East, it does also seem to suggest a concern of Bede's with Eastern Otherness similar to his otherized construction of the intransigent Irish and especially native British churches.

<sup>49</sup> See Dumville, "Essex, Middle Anglia and the Expansion of Mercia," p. 134.

<sup>50</sup> Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, p. 87.

<sup>51</sup> Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, p. 89.



<sup>52</sup> Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, p. 89.

<sup>53</sup> For example, the Great Kankakee River Marsh region in Illinois once rivaled the Everglades in size. In the 19th century it was drained by immigrant farmer-settlers, mainly of English and German descent, who considered it a wasteland. But to Native Americans it had been an "ice box," a cornucopia of food supplies, as Jerry Lewis, a Potawatomi historian and former research fellow at the Newberry Library in Chicago, noted to me in an interview.

<sup>54</sup> See Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Asser, *Alfred the Great*, ed. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1983), p. 103.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Battles describes parallels between descriptions in this poem and British legend in Layamon's *Brut* in "The Art of the Scop: Traditional Poetics in the Old English *Genesis A*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> British-Celtic Christians were described in Bede's *History* as practically reprobates, unredeemed by the reformation of the Irish at the Synod of Whitby in 664, improperly ordaining priests and bishops, and allied with the purportedly pagan Penda of Mercia against Christian Northumbria (*Ecclesiastical History*, 2.2, 2.20, 3.28, 5.23).

<sup>58</sup> See also Frank Battaglia, "The German Earth Goddess in *Beowulf*," *The Mankind Quarterly* 31 (1990-91): 415-46; Robert Bly, *Sleepers Joining Hands* (New York, 1973); Randall Bower, "Beowulf and the Bog People," in *Literary and Historical Perspectives of the Middle Ages*, ed. P. W. Cummins et al. (Morgantown, 1982); and Garrett S. Olmstead, *The Gods of the Celts and the Indo-Europeans* (Budapest, 1994), p. 230.

<sup>59</sup> Newton, *The Origins of "Beowulf"*, pp. 142-43.

<sup>60</sup> Besides apparently early accounts of magical and sacred islands in Welsh and Irish traditions, there are later widespread traditions of the Isle of Avalon associated with derivative Celtic lore, an island with a grove of apple trees associated with the site of Glastonbury Abbey in the West Country. Referred to as an Irish religious center in the *Sanas Chormaic* circa 900, Glastonbury was also described by "B" in his *Vita S. Dunstani* circa 1000 as "a certain royal island . . . spread wide with numerous inlets, surrounded by lakes full of fish and by rivers, suitable for human use . . . [where] the first neophytes of the catholic law discovered an ancient church built by no human skill" (A. Gransden, "The Growth of the Glastonbury Tradition and Legends in the Twelfth Century," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 [1976]: 343). This welcoming description of the primeval sacred island-marsh landscape of Glastonbury, rooted in tradition influenced by Celtic cultures in west Britain, stands in palpable contrast to the foreboding description of the natural landscape of the Crowland area in the

Guthlac narratives. See Alfred K. Siewers, "A Cloud of Witnesses: The Origins of Glastonbury in the Context of Early Christianity in Western Britain" (M.A. thesis, University of Wales at Aberystwyth, 1994), pp. 74-80, and "Gildas and Glastonbury: Revisiting the Origins of Glastonbury Abbey," in *Via Crucis: Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas*, ed. Thomas N. Hall (Morgantown, 2002), pp. 423-32. Likewise, early Irish voyage narratives often portray islands in otherworldly paradisaic terms; see Charles Wright, "Insulae Gentium: Biblical Influence on Old English Poetic Vocabulary," in *Magister Regis: Studies in Honor of R. E. Kaseke*, ed. Arthur Groos et al. (New York, 1986), on the patristic and Insular theme of islands as churches redeemed from paganism.

<sup>61</sup> Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, p. 44.

<sup>62</sup> Anglian tradition on the Continent (presumably a precursor to the Anglians who came to dominate Mercia) had a tradition of the otherworldly island that seems analogous with the Celtic theme evident in the Glastonbury tradition—"On an island of the sea stands an inviolate grove . . . holy of holies," sacred to the goddess Nerthus, Mother Earth (Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*, ed. D. H. Mattingly, trans. S. A. Handford [Harmondsworth, Eng., 1975], pp. 134-35). The sacredness of groves to the pagan Anglo-Saxons is also attested by place-name evidence: see David Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London, 1992), pp. 23-24.

<sup>63</sup> " . . . let [the learned reader] remember the saying of St. Gregory, who considered it to be a ridiculous thing to confine the words of the heavenly oracle within the rules of the grammarian Donatus" (Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, p. 61). This is analogous to Augustine's analysis of the Trinity, in which Edmund Hill says he concludes "that it does not matter what word you choose, it is purely a matter of convention and convenience" (*The Trinity* [Brooklyn, 1991], p. 44). As with words, so with natural phenomena: "The divine scriptures then are in the habit of making something like children's toys out of things that occur in creation," Augustine writes, by which to entice our sickly gaze and get us step by step to seek as best we can the things that are above and forsake the things that are below" (*On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green [Oxford, 1997], p. 66).

<sup>64</sup> Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, rev. ed. (New York, 1996), p. 63.

<sup>65</sup> *The Mabingi*, trans. Patrick Ford (Berkeley, 1977), pp. 42, 77, 84.

<sup>66</sup> We do have scraps of references and folklore, for example of Weland, the smith-god, "whose smithy was believed by the men of Wessex to have been in a neolithic Long Barrow on the Berkshire Downs near Uffington Castle" (Alfred Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* [Oxford, 1995], p. 569); see also Jim Hargan, "A Walk Through Time," *British Heritage* (April/May 1999): 48.

<sup>67</sup> D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1992), p. 128.

- <sup>68</sup> John Shephard, "The Social Identity of the Individual in Isolated Barrows and Barrow Cemeteries in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Space, Hierarchy and Society: Interdisciplinary Studies in Social Area Analysis*, ed. Barry C. Burnham and John Kingsbury (Oxford, 1979), p. 70.
- <sup>69</sup> Shephard, "The Social Identity of the Individual in Isolated Barrows," p. 77.
- <sup>70</sup> A system of land being held by rent or non-military service in which landholdings were subject to equal division among sons after death of the owner. By the mid- or late-Anglo-Saxon period, by contrast, the Midlands led development of "open field" communally allotted holdings and nucleated settlement landscapes, based on archaeological and historical evidence that also suggests a strong system of local lordship (C. J. Bond, "Field Systems," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge et al. [Oxford, 1999], p. 184; see also Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 105–38).
- <sup>71</sup> H. R. Ellis Davidson, "The Hill of the Dragon," *Folk-Lore* 61 (1950): 173, n. 21.
- <sup>72</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* (Oxford, 1993), p. 276.
- <sup>73</sup> Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, pp. 202–03.
- <sup>74</sup> Barbara Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999), p. 73.
- <sup>75</sup> Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c. 650–c. 850* (London, 1995), p. 55.
- <sup>76</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of St. Anthony the Great* (Willits, Calif., 1980–87?), pp. 64–65; see also *Vita S. Antoni*, trans. H. Ellershaw, in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4., ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (1892; reprint Peabody, 1999), p. 208.
- <sup>77</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of St. Anthony the Great*, p. 69; see also *Vita S. Antoni*, p. 209.
- <sup>78</sup> Willibald, *The Life of St. Boniface*, trans. C. H. Talbot, in *Soldiers of Christ*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head (University Park, Penn., 1995), p. 126. The ex-soldier St. Martin of Tours also cuts down a pagan-dedicated pine tree with miraculous results in Sulpicius Severus's late fourth-century Gallo-Roman account, but the focus there is not so much on the destruction of the tree as in Boniface's account, where the oak is then triumphantly reused for church timbers.
- <sup>79</sup> Quoted in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Oliver Davies (New York, 1999), p. 111. In another famous early medieval Irish tradition, Patrick and companions are said to have been transformed into deer to escape persecutors, while the saint evoked what has become known as the breastplate or *lorica* of Patrick, a protective prayer that invokes natural forces as expressions of divine power (Davies, *Celtic*

*Spirituality*, pp. 118–119). The privileging of wild animal life in connection with a specific place and associated human community mark an attitude toward nature that often distinguishes the approach to landscape in Celtic hagiography from Anglo-Saxon.

- <sup>80</sup> Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, p. 30.
- <sup>81</sup> Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, p. 40.
- <sup>82</sup> Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, pp. 42–43.
- <sup>83</sup> R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), p. 49.
- <sup>84</sup> Note, however, that writings about the holy places of biblical lands by Bede and others were probably attempted literary remedies among the Anglo-Saxons for this situation, as was, apparently, the prominence that Bede gave to the St. Alban's legend early in his history.
- <sup>85</sup> See Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, p. 278.
- <sup>86</sup> Marie-Louise Sjoestedt, *Gods and Heroes of the Celts*, trans. Myles Dillon (Blackrock, 1994), pp. 1–2.
- <sup>87</sup> David Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History* (New York, 2000), p. 166.
- <sup>88</sup> Standcliffe, "The British Church and the Mission of Augustine," pp. 121–22.
- <sup>89</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of "Beowulf"* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 80–82.
- <sup>90</sup> Certainly later British literary tradition in the so-called Nennian writings and those of Geoffrey of Monmouth suggests an association of dragons with control of the landscape, whether through the battling red and white dragons associated with Merlin or the title of the legendary Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon. A similar theme is found in the putative 7th-century Breton-Latin *Vita (Prima) Sancti Samsonis* in which a giant dragon is controlling the landscape from a cave, from which the saint expels him, lifting the curse (B. Lynette Olson, *Early Monasteries in Cornwall* [Woodbridge, Eng., 1989], p. 11). The symbolic power of such a chthonic monster relative to landscape may also have had vernacular mythological precedence, as seen in the world-encircling serpent of Norse tradition; see Ursula Dronke, "Beowulf and Ragnarok," in *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research* 17 (1969): 302–25.
- <sup>91</sup> See Davidson, "The Hill of the Dragon," p. 178.
- <sup>92</sup> Davidson, "The Hill of the Dragon," p. 181. For a more recent examination of backgrounds and analogues to the dragon fight, see Charlotte Rauer, "Beowulf" and *the Dragon* (Woodbridge, Eng., 2000).
- <sup>93</sup> The distinction drawn here between such "taking possession" of the land and monumentalizing it as in the Anglo-Saxon stories is that in the latter the otherworldly realm of the mounds is seized and subsumed both in the plot and in the textuality of the narrative through an allegorizing of it, whereas in the Welsh and Irish stories discussed it implicitly remains outside of human control



and more of a larger-than-life mystery that is nonetheless oddly engaging with humans (as opposed to clearly evil).

- <sup>94</sup> See Davidson, "The Hill of the Dragon," pp. 174–75. The Christian church in Britain adapted such landscape features to its claims of power as well: "Early Christian churches were sometimes built beside or even over a burial mound" (Davidson, "The Hill of the Dragon," p. 175). The mound at Dowth, near Newgrange in the Boyne Valley of Ireland, likewise became the site of a church, while the one at Knowth became an early medieval dynastic center; see Clare O'Kelly, *Illustrated Guide to Newgrange* (Ardnalee, 1978), p. 80. The ancient ritual and settlement mounds at Emain Macha and Ard Macha also became important early medieval dynastic and religious centers respectively in Ulster; see discussions in N. B. Aitchison, *Armagh and the Royal Centers in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge, Eng., 1994), and Alfred K. Siewers, "Stories of the Land: Nature and Religion in Early British and Irish Literary Landscapes" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana, 2001).

- <sup>95</sup> Karl Wentersdorf, "Guthlac A: The Battle for the Beorg," *Neophilologus* 62 (1978): 139.

- <sup>96</sup> Davidson, "The Hill of the Dragon," p. 177.

- <sup>97</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. R.K. Gordon (London, 1954), p. 262.

- <sup>98</sup> Glyn Daniel, *The Prehistoric Chamber Tombs of England and Wales* (Cambridge, Eng., 1950), p. 23.

- <sup>99</sup> The absence of the mound in itself is not surprising, given the large numbers of such mounds that have disappeared across the centuries in Britain, judging by records in the historic period of mound sites that no longer exist today. Archaeologists have analyzed the description in chapter 28 of Felix's *Vita*—Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, pp. 93, 95—and have concluded that it probably does represent "a plundered chamber barrow" (see Daniel, *The Prehistoric Chamber Tombs*, p. 23).

- <sup>100</sup> Daniel, *The Prehistoric Chamber Tombs*, p. 23, nn. 3 and 4. It has also been hypothesized to have been a Bronze Age round barrow with stone cistern. An account in 1708 of "concrete" foundation walls and unsewn stone access passages at the base of a demolished chapel on the traditional site of the saint's home may suggest lingering features of a more extensive and older passage tomb (see Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, p. 183). In any case, the word *tumulus* in Felix's account is specific in indicating a tomb, and a similarly specific term *hlaw* is used in the Old English prose translation of Felix. Davidson notes of mounds in the charters that when *beorh* or *hlaw* were used, they might be pre-Saxon mounds, later ones often being "identified by the names of the men laid in them" ("The Hill of the Dragon," p. 174). But use of the word *beorg* in *Guthlac*

A aroused scholarly controversy in the 1960s and 1970s as Anglo-Saxons debated whether the traditional translation of "mountain" (used by Gordon in his translation in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*) should be replaced by "barrow." Both meanings of the word are attested, but Lawrence Shook cites examples elsewhere in reference to an artificial mound, and proposed that this was correct here, given the relatively flat landscape of the Fens ("The Burial Mound in *Guthlac A*," *Modern Philology* 58 (1960): 4. (The traditional site of Guthlac's retreat is, however, what is now called Anchorite or Anchor Church Hill, a short distance away from the current monastery building.) The A poet's description of a *grena wong* forming an *eard* (see lines 746, 477, 256, 428, 745) indicates a clearing among the trees with a mound located somewhere within its circumference," as Shook describes (p. 5).

- <sup>101</sup> This seems reminiscent of the odd colophons to the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* in the Book of Leinster in which the Latin message denounces the tales as including "devilish lies . . . for the enjoyment of idiots," while the Irish message reads: "A blessing on everyone who will memorize the *Táin* faithfully in this form" (*The Táin*, trans. Thomas Kinsella [Oxford, 1970], p. 283).

- <sup>102</sup> Shook, "The Burial Mound in *Guthlac A*," p. 10.

- <sup>103</sup> Paul Reichardt, "Guthlac A and the Landscape of Spiritual Perfection," *Neophilologus* 58 (1974): 334.

- <sup>104</sup> Wentersdorf, "Guthlac A: The Battle for the Beorg," pp. 137–38.

- <sup>105</sup> Wentersdorf, "Guthlac A: The Battle for the Beorg," p. 140.

- <sup>106</sup> Wentersdorf, "Guthlac A: The Battle for the Beorg," p. 141.

- <sup>107</sup> See Fred C. Robinson, "Beowulf and the Appositive Style" (Knoxville, 1985).

- <sup>108</sup> See Wentersdorf, "Guthlac A: The Battle for the Beorg," p. 141.

- <sup>109</sup> James MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 344–45.

- <sup>110</sup> Charles D. Wright has examined in detail sources and relations of a motif in Anglo-Saxon poetry of the biblical Abel's blood polluting vegetation of the earth with sin. Some read this polluted-wasteland imagery as an expression of direct Augustinian allegory. See Charles D. Wright, "The Blood of Abel and the Branches of Sin: *Genesis A*, *Maxims I* and Aldhelm's *Carmen de uirginitate*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 25 (1996): 7–19.

- <sup>111</sup> See Wentersdorf, "Guthlac A: The Battle for the Beorg," p. 136, and also *Guthlac A*, lines 150a–51a. Compare these resolutions-by-conquest-and-transcendence of the wasteland with an episode from the early Latin life of the Welsh-Breton St. Samson, purported to date to the seventh century (see Olson, *Early Monasteries in Cornwall*). Samson rides the Cornish countryside of a destructive dragon, after being led to its cave and throwing it down from there to its destruction. He then takes up residence in the cave temporarily as a hermit before moving on

to Brittany. The actual landscape of the cave is described in detail, including a miraculous spring there produced by the saint's prayers. The saint founds a monastery nearby and then moves on. Here there is a casting out of a monster, and a quickening of the landscape in terms of the spring and the founding of the monastery, but the saint does not take personal possession of the site for life. The landscape remains something greater than the saint, more of an external reality than in the Guthlac poems. The victory does not create the empty-tomb-centered landscapes of *Beowulf* and *Guthlac B*. Generally, the mound dwellers of Irish and Welsh stories are not demonic monsters, as in *Beowulf* and the Guthlac accounts, though linked to earlier inhabitants of the land and natural forces.

112 Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 273–74; see also Frederick M. Biggs, "Unities in the Old English *Guthlac B*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 89 (1990): 35–51.

113 Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 275.

114 *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. S.A.J. Bradley (London, 1982), p. 281.

115 Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 277.

116 Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 277.

117 Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 278.

118 See Mark Handley, "The Early Medieval Inscriptions of Western Britain: Function and Sociology," in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Joyce Hill and Mary Swan (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 339–61.

119 Despite efforts by Gillian Overing and Marijane Osborn to retrace physically the routes of the hero *Beowulf*, and by various scholars to etymologically locate the landscape of Heorot in present-day England, the one extant Old English secular narrative cycle, unlike its Irish and Welsh counterparts, is strangely notable for its lack of connection to any specific Insular physical landscape. See Gillian Overing and Marijane Osborn, *Landscape of Desire: Partial Stories of the Medieval Scandinavian World* (Minneapolis 1994).

120 James W. Earl, "Transformation of Chaos: Immanence and Transcendence in *Beowulf* and Other Old English Poetry," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 10 (1987): 170.

121 See Newton, *The Origins of "Beowulf"* p. 132.

122 "Beowulf": A New Verse Translation, trans. Seamus Heaney (New York, 2000), p. 5. The Old English text printed alongside Heaney's translation is based on "Beowulf" with the Finnesburg Fragment, ed. C. L. Wrenn and W. F. Bolton (Exeter, 1988).

123 Heaney, "Beowulf": A New Verse Translation, p. 213.

124 Earl, "Transformation of Chaos," pp. 177–78.

125 Earl, "Transformation of Chaos," p. 178.

126 W. F. Bolton, *Alcuin and "Beowulf"* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1978), pp. 43–44.

127 Sara Higley, *Between Languages: The Uncooperative Text in Early Welsh and Old English Nature Poetry* (University Park, Penn., 1993).

128 The Anglo-Saxon tendency toward objectifying landscape in descriptions both allegorized and naturalistic can be glimpsed in a comparison of a text by Gregory familiar to the Anglo-Saxons with an Old English wisdom poem. Translated from the Alfredian version of Gregory's *Pastoral Care* by Earl, Gregory's words (with Virgilian echoes) read: "What is power and rulership but the mind's storm, always tossing the ship of the heart on the waves of thoughts?" (Earl, "Transformation of Chaos," p. 174). In *Maxims I*, part 1, lines 50–60, a parallel moral lesson is expressed in a quasi-realistic description of a sea storm. See Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, p. 253; Earl, "Transformation of Chaos," p. 172; and Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 347.

129 Anglo-Saxon literature can be termed more detailed in its treatment of landscape than other early Insular traditions in the qualified context of narrative. However the exquisite detail of description in some of the so-called Irish "nature" or "hermit" poetry shows the Irish literary tradition as more than capable of naturalistic description. Similar attention to detail is evident in Irish and Welsh narratives, although often expressionistic and not in the context of creating the impression of a coherent cause-and-effect narrative of action related to landscape. One example is the motif of describing the sight of drops of blood in snow related to the beauty of a beloved in Ulster Cycle and Welsh tales. The distinction here is between a realistic landscape narrative and what could be termed more of a mosaic approach to detail. This mosaic or "snapshot" approach is compatible stylistically with the literal tendency of Irish exegesis, in terms of the latter's frequent attention to literal detail outside of an overall linear narrative form. Stylistic tendencies in the few examples of Old English landscape narrative could be compared by analogy with modern landscape portraits rather than mosaics, or with film as opposed to still photos. Their very scarcity however suggests the triumph of allegory in the formative period of the culture, evident in the apparently progressive allegorizing of landscape in the Guthlac accounts, and in the probable dating of *Beowulf* in the same relatively early era of Anglo-Saxon letters. In *Beowulf* we find landscape depictions that are more realistically naturalistic in overall setting than the often more stylized descriptions of Welsh and Irish narratives, forming a continuous scene of action like a 19th-century panorama. But the Old English narratives about *Beowulf* and Guthlac again lack the "snapshot" details of nature and engagement with animals and rivers and trees that figure in both Welsh and Irish heroic stories, and specific associations



with Insular topography and named places made in early Celtic narratives. The "snapshot" effect of engagement in the Celtic stories and poetry is similar (and perhaps related in religious worldview as will be explored below) to that which James H. Billington observed in the Eastern iconographic tradition: an "inverse perspective" that thrusts focal points out at us, while in a seeming paradox "reminding us of our distance from heavenly things" (*The Face of Russia* [New York, 1999], p. 50). This is an aesthetic expression of the non-Augustinian cosmology expressed by St. Basil the Great and later Byzantine writers as the distinction between divine energy and essence: "We know the essence through the energy. No one has ever seen the essence of God, but we believe in the essence because we experience the energy" (quoted in Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* [Crestwood, 1999], p. 22).

<sup>130</sup> Heaney, "Beowulf": *A New Verse Translation*, pp. 37, 39.

<sup>131</sup> Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 426.

<sup>132</sup> One exception is the "Death of Fergus Mac Leide," a late addition to the Ulster Cycle (circa 1100 according to Tom P. Cross and Clark Harris Slover, *Ancient Irish Tales* [1936; reprint New York 1996]). Even here, however, with its analogues to *Beowulf*, the Irish tale of monstrous watery conflict is less charged with moral concerns of hubris and community than the Old English narrative. The contrast can also be seen in Irish hagiography, where the most famous encounter with a denizen of the deeps, that of St. Columba with the prototypical Loch Ness monster, ends merely with the saint commanding the monster to return to the depths, the saint having saved a companion in an apparent test of spiritual power with the beast. See Adomnán, *Life of St. Columba*, ed. Richard Sharpe (London, 1991), 2.27. There is no detailed or negative description of the waters or dramatic destruction of the creature as in *Beowulf*. In the story of *Táin Bó Fróech*, often cited as an Irish analogue to Beowulf's struggle in the mere, the hero's fight with the water monster occurs in the context of a wooing challenge, and he is helped by his lover who provides him with a sword, unlike Beowulf's encounter in the mere, where he is alone with the monster and finds the giants' sword in the monsters' hoard. In the Irish story, there is no detailed description of the waters, and no connection of the landscape with either the divine, moral or civilizing concerns. St. Antony's struggle with a watery serpent in Athanasius's Greek hagiography involves no slaying of the monster, which is pacified.

<sup>133</sup> See Howe's discussion of Anglo-Saxon literary landscapes, "The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England."

<sup>134</sup> The word *fyrgenstream*, used to describe the mere waters, is a sea-related term equated by Kemp Malone with Oceanus. See Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of "Beowulf"*, p. 123.

<sup>135</sup> Indeed Friedrich Klaeber in the introduction to his edition of the poem picturesquely referred to how "the brilliant picture of the monsters' mysterious haunt might well remind us of Celtic fancy" ("*Beowulf*" and *the Fight at Finnsburgh*, 3rd ed. with supplements [Lexington, Mass., 1950], p. xxi).

<sup>136</sup> Heaney, "Beowulf": *A New Verse Translation*, pp. 95, 97.

<sup>137</sup> Heaney, "Beowulf": *A New Verse Translation*, p. 99.

<sup>138</sup> See Klaeber, "Beowulf" and *the Fight at Finnsburgh*, pp. xiii–xxi.

<sup>139</sup> Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, pp. 117, 133. Sims-Williams notes that the Greek-Egyptian original of the *Visio*, the *Apocalypse of St. Paul*, evidenced a long popularity in "condemnations by Augustine. Aldhelm, Ælfric and others." This does not mean, however, that such a source outside Augustinian tradition could not be given Augustinian emphasis when drawn upon. Sims-Williams, for example, also describes a prayer of apparent Mercian provenance with analogues to one attributed to the Irishman Columbanus. Different from Columbanus's version was the putative Mercian text's "stress on human dependence, rather than human volition, in accordance with Augustine's teaching on Grace. Although Augustine wrote frequently of man's quest for God, this quest was originally inspired by God's Grace. . . . On the one hand it involves God's legitimate exercise of a terror inspired by love: on the other it co-operates with the innate motivation of the soul" (Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* [Cambridge, Eng., 1990], pp. 249, 309–10).

<sup>140</sup> Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), pp. 221–26, and Battaglia, "The Germanic Earth Goddess in *Beowulf*," pp. 415–46. North also noted evidence in *Beowulf* and other Old English works for pagan Anglo-Saxon animism, transformed in the era of Christian literacy into representations of an Odinic cult acting as a kind of symbolic "straw man" for Christian concerns about pagan idolatry. He identifies a kind of double-erasure of pagan animism in Old English literature, in which paganism (like nature) is allegorized.

<sup>141</sup> Compare the wholly non-human sea monsters in *Táin Bó Fróech*, St. Columba's encounter at Loch Ness, or St. Antony's encounter with a sea monster in Athanasius's *Vita* of the desert father. The portrayal of landscape in this scene also departs significantly from the landscapes of the Welsh and Irish stories already discussed.

<sup>142</sup> See Neville, *Representations of the Natural World*, p. 38.

<sup>143</sup> R. W. Dyson, Introduction, in Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* (*The City of God Against the Pagans*), trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, Eng., 1998), pp. xxiii.

<sup>144</sup> There are indications the Irish were less enthusiastic. For example, while the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin was a strong advocate of the *filioque*, following

Theodore of Canterbury, the Irish Eriugena did not advocate it. The Stowe Missal suggests a later addition of the *filioque* to a text of the Nicæan Creed in use in Ireland that earlier did not feature the change.

<sup>145</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Dostoevsky, the Writing of Suffering, and Forgiveness," *Black Sun*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, 1989), p. 211.

<sup>146</sup> A prototype of Western feudal monarchy differentiated from traditional conceptualizations of cosmic empire and civic space, as in for example Byzantine ideology.

<sup>147</sup> See Carole M. Cusack, *The Rise of Christianity in Northern Europe, 300–1000* (London, 1999), p. 81.

<sup>148</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, 1982), p. 71.

<sup>149</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee, 1986), pp. 472–73.

<sup>150</sup> Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, pp. 76–77. The emerging Augustinian-Gregorian conception in the early medieval West of an objectified phenomenal world is again theologically related to the developing notion of grace as created (see J. Patout Burns, "Grace," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, p. 396), and of theophany as mainly mediated through created objects, all expressed in allegorical artistic styles.

<sup>151</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 210.

<sup>152</sup> Comparison of the differing frameworks of time and space in Anglo-Saxon and Celtic narratives of landscape yields analogues too in comparative studies of hagiography in seventh- and eighth-century Frankish realms. Those saints' lives that were "Irish-inspired," according to Pierre Riché, involved the sense that "The saint has been freed from the ordinary human condition that results from man's Fall and rediscovers the harmony of paradise. In such brief moments the two worlds, which were thought to be separate, have a fleeting reunion." In those accounts influenced less by Irish monasticism on the Continent, miracles were a matter of practical betterment along a linear sense of progression in the physical realm. See Pierre Riché, "Columbanus, his Followers and the Merovingian Church," in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. H. B. Clarke and Mary Brennan (Oxford, 1981), pp. 69–70; see also John Carey's connection of non-Augustinian Irish Christian emphases with secular Irish narratives of the Otherworld in his *A Single Ray of the Sun* (Andover and Aberystwyth, 1999).

<sup>153</sup> A monument without a body, such as Beowulf's beacon mound or ultimately Guthlac's mound, the cenotaph as a symbol for mainstream Western views of nature relates also to Kristeva's description of the Augustinian Trinity as an inverted triangle. Its emphasis on God descending into creation, in its special

privileging of both Father and Son together above the Holy Spirit, reaches down to an individual focal point (the crucified Christ, the sense of the soul bound in flesh that is ultimately abandoned by the soul) and does not involve to the same extent (in Kristeva's phrase) the "erotic fusion" of the Athanasian-Cappadocian Trinity—an equilateral triangle, hinged on an upper focal point in the Father, drawing up the broad base of creation in the deification of believers.

<sup>154</sup> Again involving a more distant presence from human life than Welsh and Irish counterparts. Consider as a last example the literary construction of place in two narrative encounters with oak-related themes: Rhiannon's ride past the mound of Arberth (meaning "by the grove," in conjunction with the prehistoric mound likely referring to an oak grove of pre-Christian significance) where Pwyll waits, in the early Welsh First Branch of *The Mabinogi*, and Augustine of Canterbury's waiting for the British-Celtic bishops at the oak named for him, in Bede's Anglo-Latin *History*. The first is a non-linear otherworldly encounter integrative of nature and human activity. The second is an event placed in linear time and distinguishing between "natural" indigenous culture and the new Anglo-Saxon order. There is of course a difference in genre between the two narratives, and the story of Pwyll is later in date than Bede, though based on earlier mythic traditions. However, similar if less dramatic mythic contrasts to Bede's landscape style could be found in early Irish and Welsh mythic "pseudo-histories." And, arguably, *The Mabinogi* is a foundational narrative text of Welsh cultural identity as much as Bede's *History* was for the Anglo-Saxon people. Both descriptions involve places of "real" geographic landscape, associated by name with oaks, a native tree with traditional associations. Both also involve a certain cloaking of cultural as well as natural history in a textual landscape—in the case of Bede, of a full picture of native British Christianity, and in the case of the Welsh story, an explication of Rhiannon's associations with pre-Christian mythology of the horse goddess, although arguably her name and presentation in the story involve these implicitly in a fairly direct way. Indeed the visibility of cultural stratification in the Welsh narrative is part of the difference in approach symbolized by the contrast of the two narrative landscape settings.